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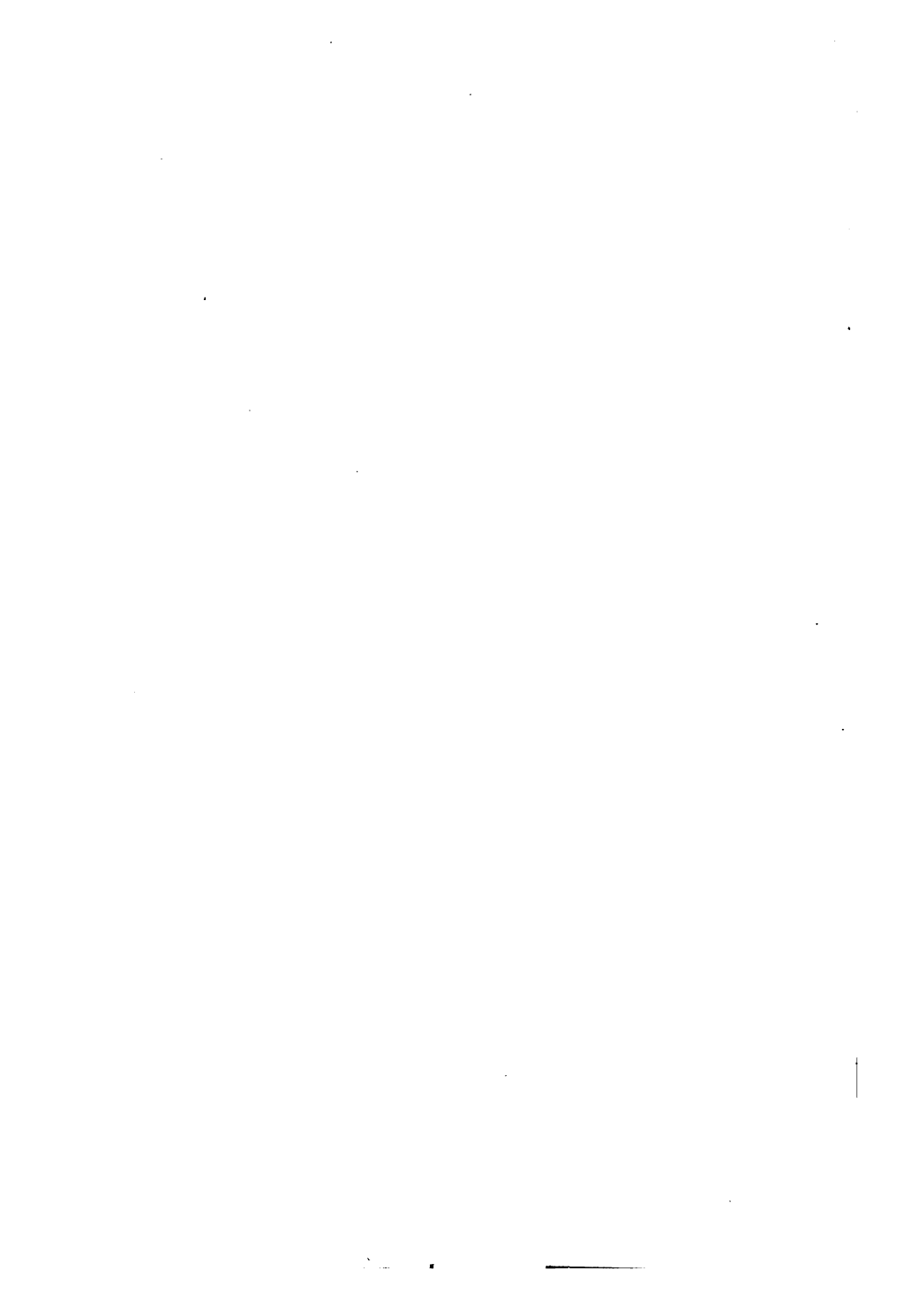


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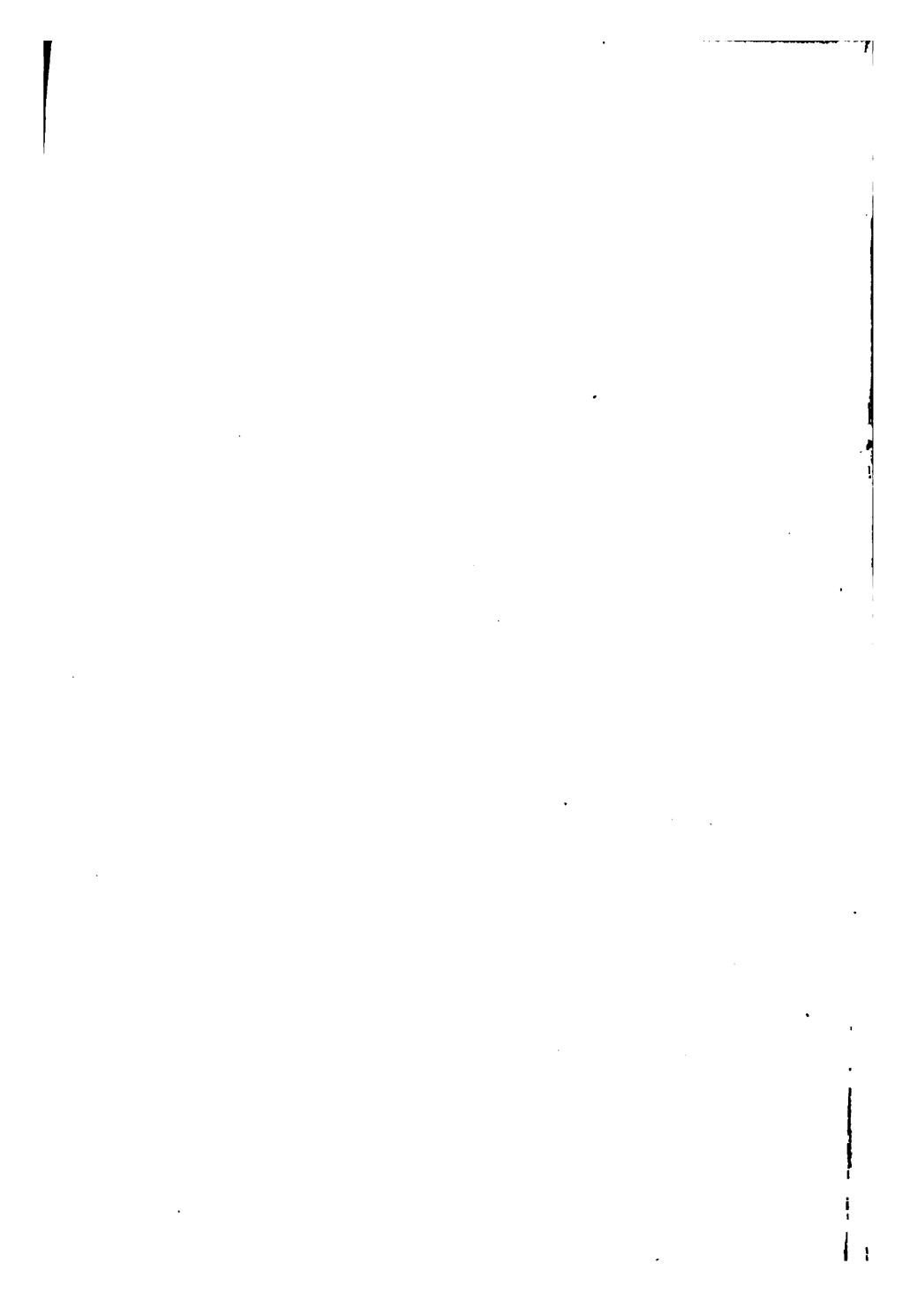
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POOR HUMAN NATURE



POOR HUMAN NATURE

A MUSICAL NOVEL

BY

ELIZABETH GODFREY pseudon.
for Jessie Bedford.

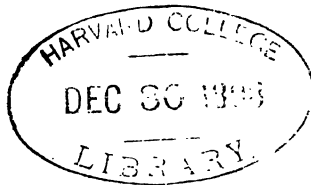


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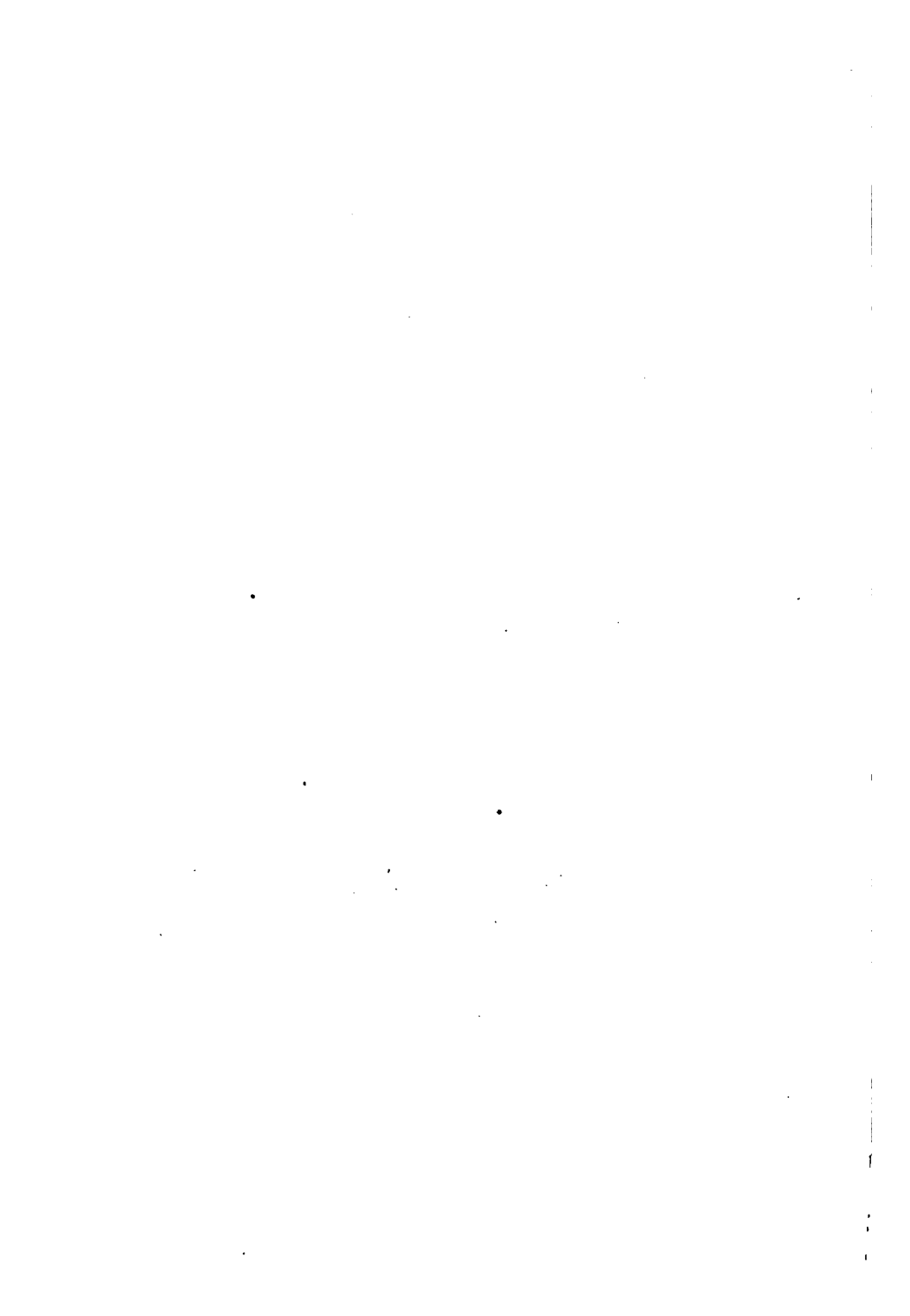
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POOR HUMAN NATURE.

I.

IT was so still that the broad river carried in its bosom a perfect picture of the village on its brink, line for line, tint for tint. First the fringe of rushes, with their plummy heads pointing downward; then the edge of the boat-builder's yard, with its stacks of huge logs and deep shadowy slips. The stout piles on which the jetty ran out seemed to go down, down into fathomless brown deeps, broken by a silvery gleam on the glassy surface where the current broke against them. Beyond the rushes a low reddish gray wall, over which lilac bushes, loaded with blossom, leaned to look at their own reflection; beyond them, again, a small quaint church, deep red, very drowsy-looking, more than half steep-pitched, tiled roof, broken with those odd dormer windows one only sees in Germany, looking like eyes with half-shut lids; flanked with an onion-shaped bell turret, weather-stained on one side to a vivid emerald-green. Behind the roof the shadows grew confused, dark green and misty blue, where the wooded gorge wound away into the heart of the hills.

The whole village—or as much of it as showed from the river, for it straggled away up the valley—looked as sleepy as the church. No work was doing in the yard, nor was there any sound of hammering among the half-finished boats. Only through the shut windows of the

church stole a dim sound of music like the drone of a bumble bee.

Suddenly the peaceful picture was broken into shards, churned into foam, by the advent of an intrusive little steamer, which came puffing up to the jetty, with a long trail of smoke behind it. Nobody wanted it; for no one landed nor went on board, though it heralded its approach by a shriek which brought out an official in a peaked cap and brass buttons from a little wooden house, like a jack-in-the-box. A few minutes and it fussed off down the river to Blankenstadt; the smoke vanished away, the swirls died down into stillness, and the picture formed itself again. The jack-in-the-box was about to shut himself in with his pipe and his Sunday paper, when he caught sight of a would-be passenger hurrying down the road in a frock coat, high hat, and patent-leather shoes. He waited and regarded him with silent compassion as he drew near. Needless to explain that the steamer was gone, for it might still be descried in the distance, though just about to vanish round a bend in the river.

"When will the next be?" panted the late-comer.

"Nine o'clock, sir; the two next don't stop at Lindendorf."

"They could be signaled, surely?"

The official shook his head slowly, but very decidedly, and retired into his box.

I am afraid an Englishman would have used language unbecoming a Sunday evening, but the traveler was a native, and therefore accustomed to bend to the yoke of the official. He betook himself to the churchyard wall, which was conveniently low and broad, and sat him down to rest after his unwonted exertions, and repair the damages dust and heat had wrought upon his outward man. He dabbed his face with a large white silk pocket-

handkerchief, twirled up the waxed points of his mustache, and flicked the dust from his shiny shoes. He was a stout man, evidently town-bred, and not used to racing about country roads in this fashion. He was, moreover, a pillar of the State in Blankenstadt, and his dignity was ruffled. Fate should have known better than to use a man of his quality so. He was, in fact, no less a person than the Intendant of the Royal Opera in Blankenstadt.

As everyone knows, the king of Blachsen is in these days but a king in name. Higher powers have torn from him the control of his foreign policy, of his army, of his very post office; but over his opera he still may rule, and Graf von Wenzel is his prime minister.

It was a diplomatic mission of great delicacy connected with his office that had taken the Herr Graf careering through the mountain gorges on this warm spring Sunday. He and his royal master had for long set their hearts on securing the services of a certain tenor whom many held to be the first singer in Europe. But the said singer, one Heilbronner, had the caprices of a spoilt child of Art; he was off and on; he would and he wouldn't, and letters and telegrams were in vain. At the moment Blankenstadt was minus a tenor of the precise caliber required, and the star must be secured at any cost. He had the reputation of darting hither and thither as the whim of the moment took him, and had last been heard of at Dandlau, a fashionable health resort on the river no great distance from Blankenstadt. The Intendant resolved to secure an interview, hoping to lime his twig with brilliant offers, and having made an appointment betook himself up the river—to find his bird was flown.

The Italian valet whom the wrathful Intendant questioned shrugged his shoulders and turned out the palms of his hands. "But the Signor was always like that;

here to-day, gone to-morrow. He had probably forgot. He had gone to visit the Bastei rock to take the air and view the fine prospect."

Thither Graf von Wenzel followed him, to hear that he had lunched there, but was now over the hills and far away. There was but a slender chance of overtaking him, but the poor Count, having dined, set off once more on foot, thinking, if he failed, he could at least catch the Blankenstadt steamer at Lindendorf. Foiled in both objects, he sat on the wall and sighed, and wished he hadn't come.

Somebody came and set the church door wide open: it was most likely hot inside. They were still singing,—there is a great deal of singing in a Lutheran church,—and the melody flowed out clear and strong. The Count got off the wall and stole nearer, as though a magnet were drawing him; for one voice outrang the others, of so rare a quality, of so strong and penetrating a sweetness, that the coarse tones of the congregation, instead of drowning it, seemed to blend into a dim background.

"I have found him!" he exclaimed. "Good luck I missed that boat. Fancy his being here, of all places." He slipped within the door, and dropped noiselessly into a seat. He was almost too late; the hymn was nearly over; once more the matchless voice swelled through the simple refrain—"Jesu nimmt die Sünder an."

The pastor entered the pulpit—a youngish-looking man, with a face like a tragic mask above his white bands and black Geneva gown. A rustle passed over the congregation as the heads were bent for the confession, and the low red sun, slanting through the west window, made the women's uncovered plaits look like a ripening cornfield. Our friend, who had an eye for a pretty woman, was attracted by a flaxen head just before him, stooping over

a nosegay of pansies and boy's-love that lay beside a large black hymn-book in the lap of a gray-blue woolen gown. He could not help wondering whether the front view were as engaging as the curve of pink cheek and coil of plaits which was all he could at present see. He would have a look presently.

A Lutheran sermon, though usually good, is nearly always long, and the Count, who was not much of a churchgoer habitually, wondered if it were worth while to sit it out; it was pleasanter outside. However, from his pew he could see the gleam of the setting sun on the river, and smell the sweet breath of the lilacs, so he took patience. Suppose he were to miss his quarry a third time! He could not help listening after all. The sermon was miles over the heads of the congregation, and as he looked round on the stolid country faces, he murmured under his breath, "This is plowing with Pegasus."

He was rewarded. The last hymn was sung as a solo by the voice he had waited to hear. It was an evening hymn, and the simple, almost childlike words were set to an air that was new to him. Beneath the veneer of man-of-the-world lurked an enthusiast, a sentimentalist. He found his eye-glasses had become unaccountably dim. "I did not think Heilbronner had it in him to be so moving," he said to himself. "He has actually improved; his voice is fresher; he must have been resting it since I heard him."

He took up his station close outside the porch as the little crowd pressed out, lingered in groups in the churchyard, and dispersed this way and that. He missed his pretty little peasant after all, or at least only caught a back view as she disappeared into the house by the boatyard in company with a tall man. He waited till the churchyard was empty; but still his man did not appear. At last came the pastor in his floating gown and square

black velvet cap, locking the little chancel door behind him. To him the Count betook himself.

"Pardon me, but could you kindly inform me whether Herr Heilbronner is staying in the village, and which way he has gone."

The tragic mask did not relax, and the wearer of it seemed intent on withdrawing the key from the lock.

"Herr Heilbronner? I have not the slightest idea."

"But you surely know who I mean? He is a singer of world-wide renown."

"I know him by name, of course; but he is not in this neighborhood so far as I am aware."

"Indeed he is. I tracked him almost this far this afternoon, and unquestionably he was in the church; but though I watched for him, I missed him coming out. I am most anxious to find him."

"I am sorry I cannot help you," said the pastor politely, raising his hat and beginning to move away.

"I don't think he can have been in the church or I must have seen him; it is so small, and I know everyone."

"He certainly was. Why, my good sir, he sang the solo after your most excellent sermon."

The stiff lines relaxed into a smile. "No, really! Did you think that was Heilbronner? How delicious! Why, that was the schoolmaster. I must tell him."

"Nonsense!" cried the Intendant quite rudely. "Do you suppose I don't know the difference between the Star of Munich and a village schoolmaster? I beg your pardon, but that is too rich. He is a fantastic fellow, and doubtless masqueraded; it was just what I could fancy him doing."

"Then he has been doing it every Sunday for the last five years," retorted the pastor dryly.

"To show you that I have a right to speak with some authority," said the other, "allow me to offer you this,"

and extracted from his card-case a card on which was written with many flourishes, "Graf Rudolf von Wenzel, Königliche Oper-Intendant in Blankenstadt."

The pastor raised his eyebrows as he took it. "This makes the honor to Dahlmann the greater," he said. "The parsonage is not far off, and I have an arbor overlooking the road. He must pass my house to reach his own. If you will do me the pleasure to accompany me and take a glass of mai-trank, I can give you an opportunity of hearing him and deciding whether he is Heilbronner masquerading, or an impostor, or himself."

The Intendant was by no means sorry to accept the invitation; it would at any rate enable him to dispose of some of the long waiting-time before the next steamer, and he walked off beside his new acquaintance, the latter striding silently on, beheading the tall wayside weeds with his stick as he passed. The pastor rather puzzled his companion; he was evidently a cultivated man, his sermon showed that; but he had the shy, brusque manner of one on whom a habit of solitude has grown till every stranger seems an enemy. Another curious point the Count noticed, as the talk, labored on one side, touched on musical affairs; he seemed familiar with every event of importance up to a point somewhere in the last decade: later all seemed hearsay. That a man of taste could live some score of miles from a great musical center like Blankenstadt, with a daily service of steamers, and know as little of what went on there now as if he were in Kamschatka, seemed strange.

They soon reached the parsonage, a little house built into the side of the hill where the road began to climb steeply. There was a long flight of steps up to the door, and on the top of a high wall, like a rampart, was a terrace bordered with a row of standard lilacs like toy trees from a Noah's ark, and ending in a square arbor fur-

nished with rustic seats and table. Thither a maid-servant soon brought two large tankards of mai-trank, very grateful to the Intendant after his long, dusty tramp. He leaned back luxuriously and produced a silver cigar case, which he offered to his host, who, however, preferred his own long-stemmed, china-bowled pipe. Very soon there were voices in the dusky lane below, and the pastor, leaning over, called out: "Dahlmann, is that you? Come up here one moment. I want you."

"I can't just now," came the answer. "I am seeing Hedwig Baumfelder home. I will come back."

"But that won't do; it will be too late. There is a gentleman with me who is anxious to see you, and he has to go on by the last boat. Hedwig won't mind coming in a moment?"

"Surely not, Herr Pfarrer," and the unseen pair began to mount the steps. First appeared the selfsame pretty fair head that had been in front of the Count in church, now covered by a little black lace-like woolen shawl, tied loosely under the chin; but his eye wandered past her wild-rose coloring to the man who followed her.

"Is this your schoolmaster?" he whispered.

The pastor nodded. "We want you just to sing the last stanza of the evening hymn, if you will be so good," he said, not pausing to make any introductions.

The newcomer bowed, leaned back lightly with his hands behind him on the balustrade of the arbor, and lifting his chin a little, sang very softly, but in a voice so clear it might have reached the stars, the little childish verse:

"Kranken Herzen sende Ruh,
Nasse Augen schliesse zu ;
Gott im Himmel, halte Wacht,
Gieb uns eine gute Nacht."

While he sang the Intendant was scrutinizing him as one man seldom scrutinizes another. The face was in shadow, but the long-limbed, broad-shouldered figure, its stateliness triumphing over the country-made suit of blue homespun, the magnificent column of throat, the small head and short fair beard, were sharply outlined against the evening sky.

When the last note had melted into the stillness the pastor was the first to speak. "Well, mein Herr, will you admit that this is not Herr Heilbronner, neither did he borrow his voice to-night?"

"I give in. I give in!" cried the Intendant.

The singer straightened himself. "Do I understand I was the subject of a wager?" he said, turning to his friend with a slight annoyance in his tone.

"No, no; only this is the Herr Intendant of the Blankenstadt Opera. He wants to find Herr Heilbronner, and hearing you sing in church he was convinced that you were he."

"I am greatly flattered. And now that you are satisfied, mien Herr, we will be going on our way."

"But I am not satisfied," cried the Count. "I am convinced, I own, but I cannot be satisfied without hearing your voice in something more worthy of it than the little hymn, sweet though the setting is. Whose is it?"

"Mine. I set it for the children to sing after school, and the people liked it, so we have it in church now. It is but a trifle."

"You must sing to me again. Herr Pfarrer, you have doubtless some instrument in the house? You will permit me the opportunity of hearing your friend?"

"Certainly I would; but you will not think me inhospitable if I remind you that the last boat goes in a quarter of an hour."

"Zum Teufel with the last boat. I shall sleep at the inn—I suppose there is an inn?"

"Then come in." The pastor led the way to the house, and Dahlmann said to his companion, "The aunt won't be getting uneasy?"

"Oh, no; she knows I am with you."

They went into a long low room, crammed with books, and half-filled up at the further end with a small chamber organ. Reichardt lighted a pair of candles, which cast a circle of yellowish light on the keyboard and on the three men who gathered round it, while the girl, whom nobody heeded, sat down modestly in the shadow near the door.

"What shall I sing?" said Dahlmann, hurriedly turning over a pile of music that lay on a chair. "This?" and he placed Beethoven's "Adelaide" on the desk.

Graf von Wenzel had heard many men sing "Adelaide," and he thought he knew the full compass of tenderness and passion which it holds, but it was a revelation to him. He got up and prowled about the room in his excitement. When it ended he asked the singer abruptly, "How old are you?"

Dahlmann turned round from the organ. "How old am I?" he repeated in surprise; for he really thought the visitor had gone demented.

"Yes, yes. Pardon me, but I have a reason for asking."

"I am just eight-and-twenty."

"I wish you had been ten years younger. But what sort of training have you had?"

"Excuse me, Herr Graf; I think I see your drift. If I had applied to you for an engagement at Blankenstadt there would have been some reason in your catechising me; but allow me to remind you I have not done so, and I have no idea of changing my present calling."

"Pshaw! was a voice like that intended to grow hoarse in shouting to children their B A, Ba? Have you no ambition?"

"At my age, sir, a man's career is pretty well fixed.

I don't say I never thought of a different one, but earlier there were reasons that made me turn aside. If, as you say, I had been ten years younger, it might have been possible."

"You must have had a thorough training. Singing such as yours does not come by nature."

"I studied some years under Dietrich. Of course you knew him?"

"Dietrich!" cried the Count. "If you are Dietrich's pupil you have not much to learn. Do you mean to say that he could permit you to hide your light under a bushel?"

Dahlmann smiled. "If you knew anything of Dietrich in his latter years you would know what a bitter quarrel he had with the musical world, in Blankenstadt especially. His advice to me was always to keep out of it."

"Aye, aye, I remember; but that is an old story—centuries old. You would not let the cranky prejudices of a superannuated, embittered old man like that sway your judgment?"

"No; mine were family reasons. He was crazed on the subject. You know he died mad, poor old fellow?"

"I know he did. He was not much otherwise when I knew him. But you must not take his view of us in Blankenstadt. Herr Pfarrer, will you induce your friend to listen to me. It is quite possible I might be able to put something good in his way."

The pastor's long nervous fingers were silently moving over the keys; he looked round. "It is not for me to interfere," he said.

Meanwhile the Intendant's sharp eyes, roving round the room, espied a broken-backed, paper-covered copy of "Tristan und Isolde" in a condition that betokened much hard usage. In a moment he had taken it from the shelves and was turning the leaves hurriedly.

"Ah," he said, "the Love duet. I should like to hear you in that; but we want an Isolde. Does she sing?" indicating the quiet little figure in the corner.

Dahlmann laughed out at the notion of Hedwig as Isolde. "No, mein Herr, she does not sing at all."

"What a pity! If we had but Miss Arrowsmith now! I should like to hear you sing that scene with her. If you had ever heard her you would be tempted to Blankenstadt easily enough."

The girl by the door made a restless movement, but the men were too absorbed to notice her, and the Intendant hastily fluttered over a few more pages. "Then we must have this," he said.

He swept the pastor off the music stool, and began the accompaniment himself, and, almost against his will, Dahlmann found himself breathing forth Tristan's dying monologue by the seashore, the notes rising and falling like the waves, sinking away at last till they seemed to come from an immense distance, faint yet clear. When he ceased there was a momentary hush; even the Intendant did not speak. It was broken by the girl's voice: "Really, Friedel, we must go. Do you know how late it is?"

"Of course; we will go at once. I am so sorry."

As they bade good-night, the Count said significantly, "You shall hear from me."

"What a very odd man, Friedel; I did not like him at all, did you?" said Hedwig, slipping her hand into her lover's arm as they turned into the dark ravine that led to her home.

"Cracked, most likely. Of course it was all moonshine." But when she tried to talk of other things he could hardly answer her.

"He has bewitched you, I think," she said, as he left her at her own door.

II.

THEY tell us that in these days friendship is becoming rarer than it used to be; we all have so many acquaintances, we have not time for friends. As we fritter our minds away on a multitude of pursuits, so our hearts on a multitude of minor likings. But the pastor and the schoolmaster of Lindendorf were friends in the old full sense. Some years ago Anton Reichardt, a brilliant popular preacher from the North of Germany, found himself stranded here, with broken health and shattered nerves, his life cut in two, as it were, by a tragic event which has nothing to do with the present story, condemned to spend the remainder of an existence which, though it might be long, could never again, he told himself, be either happy or useful in this out-of-the-way cure of souls. At one stroke wife and child, mother and brother, friend and acquaintance, had been cut away from him. His new flock shrank, or he thought they did, from the gloom and mystery that hung about him; but one warm, friendly hand was stretched out to him, and, clasping it, he felt linked to natural human life once more.

He had not been long in the Lindenthal before he recognized in the young schoolmaster a man of a very different type to the "superior person" we are apt to connect with that calling. The first thing that pierced the fog of despondency in which he had been wrapped was the sound of a marvelously beautiful voice issuing from the little schoolhouse as he passed by one evening when lesson hours were over, and music, the strongest link among any of the mutual interests that may draw

two diverse minds together, was the beginning of a friendship between the two solitary men which soon grew more than brotherly. Lonely both had been; the one from cruel circumstance, the other with the natural loneliness of a mind gifted out of all relation to its surroundings. Dahlmann had nothing in common with the young farmers and brewers who formed the whole society within reach of the Lindenthal; reserved and self-reliant, he could easily do without it, but he responded at once to contact with a mind of power and cultivation. He gained from his new friend a precious store of learning, different from the ordinary course of gymnasium and college; he drank in from him refined and scholarly modes of thinking; what he gave in return he could not estimate—the support of his sane and robust nature, which helped the once tottering mind to regain its balance.

Besides music, which was the deepest passion of both, the two had many tastes in common. Both had a certain poetic faculty, both were devoted to the study of language and literature. Dahlmann's education had been far beyond that of the ordinary schoolmaster; his was a mind which quickly assimilated all culture; he read voraciously, and with the stores of the parsonage library open to him, soon stood on the same mental level as his friend. In temperament there was a strong contrast: Reichardt had the quick, emotional nature that belongs to musical sensibility; Dahlmann the serenity of temper, the quiet self-confidence that sometimes, though not always, accompanies gifts of a very high order. Partly from a peculiar upbringing, partly by nature, there was a sober gravity about him always; the older, sadder man was infinitely quicker with laugh or jest.

Dahlmann's mother, since dead, lived with him and kept his house, but between him and her, though there was devoted affection and some similarity of temper, there

was no companionship, no sharing of tastes or interests. She was a noticeable woman, deeply pious after a somewhat narrow and rigid fashion; uneducated, but naturally of strong intellect and stronger will, she had brought up her son rigorously according to her own views, and to outward appearance ruled his manhood as she had ruled his youth. Passionately fond of music by nature, she had been taught to regard it as one of the snares of the Evil One, for she was "streng evangelisch," and she tried to strangle the taste in her boy as she had strangled it in herself. When she heard him singing profane songs about the house, she whipped him and shut him up in the garret, but he sang till he was let out again and scrawled bars of melody he had picked up by ear on the white-washed walls of his prison with a rusty nail.

He had no playmates; bred up in a village even more remote among the hills than Lindendorf, his had been a most solitary childhood. He was the only child of his father's old age by a second marriage, and his half-brothers and sisters were more like uncles and aunts to him—hardly even that—"a little more than kin and less than kind" might be said of them, for his existence was disapproved of in the family.

Whether his gift would have perished by inanition may be a question, but it so happened that Dietrich, the renowned Kapellmeister, who had kept the musical life of Blachsen in a ferment for half a century, wearied and disgusted with a world which would not allow itself to be trampled under his tyrannical feet, had retired to eat out his heart in the solitudes of the mountain village where Dahlmann lived. To him the ten-year-old boy secretly betook himself with the calm proposal that the veteran should give him lessons, to be paid for in the future by the money he would earn doing odd jobs of copying and accounts for his eldest half-brother, or by

any personal service the master would be pleased to lay upon him. The very audacity of the idea tickled the old man's fancy; he began to teach the boy as an amusement to distract him from the misery and loneliness to which he had condemned himself, till it became the solace and pride of his waning life.

The child had already learned all that the village organist could teach, and to him the foundation laws of music, clefs, chords, progressions, came by nature, as the first book of Euclid did to Newton—not as things to be learned, but self-evident facts needing no demonstration. As to voice production, he sang as a bird sings; Dietrich had the supple young throat to develop as he would from the beginning. He did not spare him, but the fine physique answered to the demand. Half his time given to his school-work, and half to incessant study and practice, much of it in the open air, seemed only to toughen his capacity. The years of Gymnasium, where distance obliged him to be a resident pupil, coincided with the change of voice, during which Dietrich had forbidden all use of it, and he came home in time for his old master to nurse the budding tenor into an exquisite perfection.

His mother's dream for him had been the University and the pastorate, and to that end she had saved and toiled, had stinted herself and her household, doubting nothing that a boy so grave and steady as hers would fulfill her wish without question. But the question did not at once arise; when he left school there was need for him at home. The old pastor with failing eyesight wanted young eyes to read and write for him, a strong young arm on which to lean. The boy could study with him, he said; College might come later when he could spare him. So Ehrenfried continued to live at home, and spent every free moment with Dietrich, learning the

leading parts of most of the great operas, both old and new, with all the finish that his master's exquisite teaching could give.

He was singularly free from the restless ambition which properly belongs to the artist; he had his dreams, but they did not seem realizable yet, and Dietrich's word was always—wait. "Some day we will astonish them," he used to say. Once when his pupil was regretting that he could not have a year or two at one of the great Conservatoires, he broke out angrily: "Conservatoire! What do you suppose they could teach you there that I have not taught you?—except maybe to bow and scrape and prance upon the sloping boards. Don't you know that you can give a finer Lohengrin, a finer Faust now than nine-tenths of the young popinjays the Conservatoires turn out by the score? Have they a professor—tell me that—who can hold a candle to old Dietrich? Hein? though he be old and mad."

That was only a few weeks before the madness that had long hovered like a vulture over the old man became a dire reality, and he had to be taken away.

When the old pastor died freedom did not at once come to Ehrenfried. The widow was left very slenderly provided for; the first family, of course, must have their share of what would hardly bear dividing, and the younger son and his mother must face the world for themselves. Frau Dahlmann was ready with her scheme of life, and it was then that she first realized that her son was a grown man. She produced her treasured hoard; she told him he should have a year—two if possible—at the University to fit him for the ministry; she would live with him and eke out the insufficiency by her needle. College life would have pleased him well, but he would not accept it at the price of putting an insuperable bar between himself and the career he would have chosen;

neither would he let his mother sacrifice herself in the vain hope of what he could not do. Candidate, he told her, he would never become. Still he could no more have outraged her strong feelings by embracing the life of a professional singer,—a life from which she shrank as though it were something evil,—now especially, in her moment of loss and desolation, than he could have struck her. There was no struggle, no conscious renunciation; it simply never occurred to him as possible that he could do it. Something he must do; he must earn his own livelihood, and after the needful preparation, lengthened by a break for his year of military service, he was installed as master of the district school at Lindendorf—a post obtained for him by the interest of his eldest brother, who was a boat-builder there in a large way of business. There he could at least make a home for his mother, and try to atone to her for her bitter disappointment.

Music was, as it had always been to him, the solace and joy of all his leisure hours, and they were many; his was too large and energetic a nature to be filled with the daily drudgery of his work, and his mother presently learned to recognize the futility of girding at the one outlet he allowed himself, which she had to admit kept him tranquil and content.

Years went on unheeded in the monotonous round, and when Frau Dahlmann died of a lingering and painful illness the time for new beginnings seemed to have long gone by. Had the suggestion not come from outside it would never have come.

Anton Reichardt was longing to know whether anything further had been heard from the strange Sunday night visitor, but he had kept away. He would not interfere, he said; if Ehrenfried had anything to tell him he would come; but two days had passed, an unusual break in their almost daily intercourse, this was the third,

and he could wait no longer. He betook himself to the schoolhouse, which lay farther up the valley, in a position more central to the widely scattered district than was the church. School hours were over, as he could see by the number of tow-colored or flaxen heads and stumpy, satchel-laden figures that bobbed their Gud'ndag to the pastor as they trotted by. The schoolroom was not closed, however, and from the window proceeded a droning sound like the buzz of a bluebottle fly.

"At work still, Ehren?" He went close to the window and leaned on the sill. A rather flushed and wearied countenance looked out at him.

"I have got three culprits in for insubordination, and as I had promised Fuchs he should go early, I had to stop with them myself. I believe," he added in an undertone, "it was because I felt so impatient to be gone I was the more bound to be strict."

"Well, let the little victims go now, and come out with me. It is too hot for severity."

"I must just see if they know their lines." He turned back into the room, and in two minutes three small boys burst from the door like stones from a catapult, followed more sedately by the master.

"Well, if they are half as glad to get out as I am to be rid of them——" He finished his sentence with a mighty yawn. "They probably think it is the joy of my life to keep them in. Will you come into the house, or shall we go for a good stretch? I feel inclined for the Teufelskammer."

Reichardt assented, and they turned their steps away from the village street up a steep, narrow track. When they had gained a little height, and the clustered red roofs lay beneath their feet, Dahlmann said, "I was just coming to you; I have so much to tell you."

"You have heard from our friend, then?"

"Yes. I hardly expected it. I fancied he was an impulsive kind of person who, after a night's rest, would think what a fool he had been; but on Monday morning he appeared at school. I suppose he is not an early riser, for by the time he got up there I was taking the first class in history. I had to tell him I could not attend to him then, but I should be at his service at midday; however, it seemed he was obliged to get back to Blankenstadt, so he went off very cross, but saying he would write."

"If you had been the most astute, instead of the simplest of mankind, I don't suppose you could have enhanced your value with him better."

"I never thought of that; only I could not have the school work upset."

"And then," said the pastor, with a smile in his eyes, "you returned to your dates and events as tranquilly as if nothing had happened."

"Well, I had to. Besides, I did not suppose anything would come of it."

"And something has?"

"Tuesday there was no letter," pursued Dahlmann, "and I put the whole thing out of my head. This morning came this. Will you read it?"

"Wait till we get to the top."

They were just emerging from the dense woods that clothed the mountain-side, and in a few minutes they reached the summit, where jagged pinnacles of gray rock, spurning the pine-trees from their sides, shot into the blue ether. They seated themselves on a ledge, from which they looked down on the broad river winding away to the town, on the wide, fair landscape, and on a range of oddly shaped, square-topped hills looking like a chain of fortresses. Anton took the letter and read it slowly; as he gave it back he said, "You take this very calmly."

"Do I? I haven't said much perhaps, but I feel very much as a tree to be transplanted might feel when the spade goes down under his roots."

"You are going to be transplanted then?"

"What do you say? Tell me; what shall I do?"

"Don't ask me." Reichardt's voice sounded harsh.

"Ehren, can I bid you go?"

He fixed his eyes on the hill opposite till its hard outline grew blurred and misty. Presently Dahlmann spoke:

"After all, it would be folly to make such a plunge at my age; it is not as if I were a young fellow. My work is here. We will put this aside as a wild chimera—which it certainly is."

The pastor laid his hand on his friend's knee. "Ehren, if you gave this up because of me I should never forgive you. Do you think I could ever be happy in your company if I had let the shadow of my life darken yours? I take blame to myself that I have not urged you long ago to strike out a career worthy of you. I knew you had genius which it was a sin to hide, but you always seemed so tranquil, so contented that I let the time slip by. And then for so long you have never spoken of it. Why, now I come to think of it, I don't believe you have been in to Blankenstadt to hear an opera these two years."

"No, I have not. I found it would not do; it asked too much of me. The winter before last, when the dear mother was failing, I felt that for a time at least I must forego it, and since—well, I hesitated to wake it all up. Since I had to be a schoolmaster, I did not want to be a poor one, but I am afraid I have not succeeded very well; the fact is, I don't care for children much, and I do gird at the drudgery sometimes. A better man would find it a noble calling, though—nobler, perhaps, than the other."

"I am not so sure. To interpret the finest creations of genius as you could interpret them is perhaps to be a schoolmaster in a bigger school. Not that I admit for one moment, mind you, that you failed in the other. I am sure you were always conscientious and patient with those brats. The rare gift, though, is the one to use."

"If it isn't too late," put in Ehrenfried musingly.

"It might be if you had to begin at the bottom of the ladder and climb slowly up; but the amazing thing about this letter is the hint that you might obtain the post for which they have been struggling to secure Heilbronner. Not but what your voice is fully equal to his, but you have no experience. Singing Wagner with me or with Dietrich is a different matter to singing on the stage."

"I don't doubt it. I shall say nothing to anyone till I have been to Blankenstadt to be tried. You see, he wants me to go on Sunday; says the King wishes to hear me."

"Well, go. Go and prosper."

"You know," pursued Dahlmann after a minute's silence, "this isn't such a very new idea to me. Years ago, when old Dietrich used to talk of it, I did think it might be possible some day; but my dear mother was so dead against it: she had peculiar views. She wanted me to promise her I never would go on the stage; but I don't think people ought to ask such promises. Well, if she knows anything about it now, dear soul, she has a wider outlook."

They sat silent a little while, watching the cloud shadows drift across the valley. Then Dahlmann, who was throwing fir-cones with careful aim at a cottage chimney a mile below, said slowly: "Do you know I had another important bit of news for you, and I was coming to tell you about it on Sunday evening; only your friend, the Intendant, burst upon us with his astonishing proposals.

This, I dare say, won't surprise you half as much. I am thinking of getting married."

"Married! Not to Hedwig Baumfelder? Don't tell me you are engaged to her. Ehren, in this I entreat you, don't act hastily."

"My dear fellow, I don't think anyone could accuse me of haste. I have known Hedwig from a child, and you must allow it is full time I took a wife if I ever mean to. As the Herr Intendant hinted the other day, I am no chicken."

The pastor looked at him with troubled eyes. "May be," he said; "yet this same taking a wife is a serious matter."

"Of course it is serious," said Dahlmann gravely. "But come, now, could I have made a more prudent choice?" Then, as his friend remained silent: "Why, what have you against her? She has very little money, it is true, but you are the last man to cast that up against her. Is she not modest, gentle, and good, and very pretty?"

"She is; but I did not think you were the man to blunder into tying yourself to the first pretty face that takes your fancy."

"I should not put that first," said the lover, rather injured. "I own I should not care to marry a plain woman; but I can honestly say that it was less her looks than her gentle disposition that moved me. I think you are unjust."

"Perhaps I am. She may be all that you say. No doubt she would make an excellent wife for nine men out of ten; only not for you. She is not of your sort: you do not think the same thoughts, care for the same things; her little shallow soul is bounded by her milk-pails and her mending-basket."

"All the more likely to make her husband's home com-

fortable," answered Dahlmann with a laugh. "I know she is not clever; no one has more cause to know that than I have. The labor it cost to get the simplest sum into her mind, poor little maid; but she was always so docile and gentle. I am a true German; I don't care for the 'emancipirte Frau.' My dear mother was one of the best of women, and she had very little learning."

"It is not learning I mean so much as capacity. Your mother was a very clever woman. What I miss in Hedwig is any power of entering into your pursuits, of helping you on instead of tying you down to the narrow sort of life you have known here. If you are going out into the world,—and I take it for granted you will go,—it seems a thousand pities you should not go free."

"I am not so sure. I think I would sooner be anchored to a country home."

"Well," said the pastor with a sigh, "I suppose in these matters every man knows his own needs best—or ought to; but I would fain see you straining after a woman who would be a spur to you, not a clog—one whose companionship would be like that of another, better self."

"Blue roses, Anton, blue roses. You are more visionary than I am."

"On the contrary, it is you who are ignorant of life's possibilities. I am not romancing; I am only remembering."

It was very seldom that Dahlmann had heard his friend refer to his own brief married life, and he kept silence for a minute or two. Then he said gently:

"But, you know, I think your experience was exceptional."

"I suppose it was. But isn't it the exceptional experience that gives one insight into the heart of things. I don't think you at all grasp the infinite importance of the

step you are taking. Do you remember what Zerubbabel told King Darius was the strongest earthly power?"

"I know. But isn't that just what a wise man would avoid submitting himself to?"

"You are looking at it on its lower side; but there is a higher. On the one side it may drag down to hell; on the other it may raise to heaven. Most men allow too much to the influence of a woman on their lives: you are disposed to allow too little."

"After all," said Dahlmann in a rather defensive tone, "I don't see that one can act more wisely than by choosing a nice, well-brought-up, affectionate girl who will look after one's home and so forth. I doubt if I should appreciate the sort of close companionship you suggest. I would rather have my soul to myself."

Anton rose to his feet. He realized he was plowing the seashore.

"Well," he said, "if you have already spoken to her,—and I suppose you have, or she would not have been allowed to stay out with you on Sunday evening,—words about it now are vain."

"Yes, I have spoken. Yet let me hear if you have any more objections to urge. You will be more comfortable if you free your mind of all your protests."

"I have one more; the weightiest of all. You are not the least bit in love with her."

"My good Anton, are you not a little inconsistent? Just now you said I was carried away by a pretty face; now you will have it I am not in love. I am really very fond of her; I always have been. It is not my nature to rave, you know. I should hate to be violently in love, and go sighing about, thinking the world well lost for a woman's smile. I am a prosaic fellow; I never did care for girls much, you know. If Hedwig had been like some, making a great deal of her favors, now on, now off, it would

not have attracted me in the least; but she is such a simple little soul, I felt quite sure of her."

"I wish you were not quite so sure. It would do you good to have to look up a little."

Dahlmann laughed. "Considering what our relation was till within the last few years, you could hardly expect it. One could not well kneel at the feet of a girl one has punished and put in the corner not so very long ago."

Anton strode on down the hill, but presently pulled up abruptly.

"I have vexed you," he said, "and all to no purpose."

"I am sorry you take it like this. I suppose nobody ever did approve of his friend's choice. It must make no difference between us, though. There isn't a woman in the world worth quarreling with you about. Married or single, nothing shall come between you and me."

III.

MONDAY came, and Hedwig Baumfelder was taking her solitary way along the gorge by which the mill stream traveled down to the river. It chanced that that especial Monday was a school holiday, so Dahlmann had settled to spend the Sunday night in Blankenstadt, and come back by the afternoon boat. Good-natured Käthe, Hedwig's youngest cousin, had volunteered to perform all her little tasks about the house, to feed the poultry, make the pepper cakes for tea, and lay the table, that she might go and meet her lover. "He'll expect you to," she said, and Hedwig, though she doubted, went.

Her home was in the mill at the head of the ravine, where the water, narrow though it was, came down with sufficient force to turn a water-wheel. The valley widened to a little platform just big enough to contain the mill cottage and a little grove of beeches. Above the chimneys, reached by a steep scrambling path, was a higher platform, more open to the rays of the sun, where a small orchard, now a mass of blossom, had found a foothold. Higher still the hills opened out to admit a cluster of red-tiled, timbered, creamy-white cottages and long low barns jumbled together, and interspersed with snowy pear trees and spiky chestnuts. Beyond towered the gray peaks of a mountain ridge, not unlike the jagged teeth of an old broken comb, which went by the name of the Teufelskamme or Devil's Comb. Below the mill the gorge narrowed with almost precipitous sides, that in some places hardly admitted the noonday sun. Beside the brown hurrying stream that broke and sparkled over

the pebbles and bowlders, golden in the light like clear amber, dark sepia-colored in the shadows, there was only just room for a footpath that skipped from side to side on stepping-stones, according as the rocky buttresses stood forward or gave place. On either hand rose a sheer wall of gray rock, giving here and there a foothold to a hardy pine, which, with its twisted roots fast clenched in a cleft, shot straight upward toward the light to an immense height before it spread into an umbrella-shaped mass of inky green. In the more open parts delicate, fairylike birches clung, their exquisite fresh green showing like flecks of sunlight against the dark pines. The rugged banks were tapestried with ferns and toadflax, and feathery stalks of Solomon's seal leaned over the water. There was not a sound except the voluble clatter of the stream, now sinking to a confidential murmur, now rising to noisy vociferation over some obstacle.

Hedwig sauntered slowly along: she was not in haste. Her betrothal was so new, she felt a shyness about meeting her lover at the landing-stage under the eyes of the jack-in-the-box, and perhaps those of Ehrenfried's step-sister-in-law from her window hard by. She thought she would not go beyond the turning into the highroad; she could wait for him there and meet him unseen. Her face, naturally a pensive one, wore to-day a slight additional gloom. She hardly looked like a girl who had just attained the summit of her desires and was on the way to meet the man she adored. A week ago she had told herself that she was at last perfectly happy, and already a cloud had appeared in her fair sky. Hedwig's skies scarcely ever were quite cloudless; perhaps because she was so given to day-dreaming; she asked so much for herself, her wishes could hardly be fulfilled under the imperfect conditions of human affairs. She had said, Let but Ehrenfried Dahlmann's love be granted her, and

she would have nothing to wish for; and now it was hers, but her newborn joy trembled against a background of apprehension but half laid to rest.

She was morbidly on the lookout for thorns in her lot, and this first week the thorns had been many. This very expedition was a grievance. Ehrenfried had been very uncommunicative about it; but she had been with him on Sunday night, and what she did not know she guessed, and she was hurt that she had not been taken into counsel. Any change in his life now must affect her equally, and from such a change as she dimly imagined she thrank with horror. Her aunt had brought her up in the same narrow, rigid school of thought to which Ehrenfried's mother had belonged, and to her timid soul it seemed that the stage was of necessity something wicked and dangerous. The very idea that her revered mentor, the schoolmaster, might suddenly turn into an opera singer on her hands threw her into a state of bewildered dismay.

She hated the notion of town life: she had never been into Blankenstadt but once, and the bustle and noise repelled far more than the gayety attracted her. Her castle in the air was nothing more ambitious than the little gabled schoolhouse at the corner of the village street. The position of schoolmaster's wife was quite as proud a one as she felt any desire for; and it seemed hard that it should be about to be snatched away. She felt she was not treated fairly. She poured out her fears and misgivings to her aunt, who urged her to use her influence with Dahlmann to turn him aside from any such mad scheme, as she characterized it. Her influence! She only wished she felt any confidence in it. Timidly she tried to persuade him to give up his Sunday journey to Blankenstadt, to find herself good-humoredly set aside like a child who interferes in what it does not under-

stand. How was it that while she could twist her big cousin, the miller, round her little finger, and rule despotically over the girls, before her betrothed she felt abashed, powerless?

The truth was she did not stand upon her proper level with Ehrenfried Dahlmann. For years he had been her ideal of beauty, wisdom, and goodness; when she used to go with the other little maidens to the school, his praise was rapture, his reproof despair; and that audacious children could be found to defy his authority was to her matter of sorrowful and indignant wonder. As she outgrew the age when she would fetch and carry for him, and put nosebags on his desk, a more personal feeling crept into her regard. Perhaps it was because her cousins foolishly joked her about him, perhaps because, in spite of her slowness, she had always been undisguisedly a favorite; but though there was nothing on his part that could be construed into love-making, she suffered him to become the object of her girlish dreams. Hopeless dreams for the most part, but occasionally flickering up into faint assurance, she continued to nurse them; now encouraged by his evident indifference to all other feminine attractions and partiality for herself, now cast down by the conviction that the affectionateness of his manner was just what one would show to a favorite child, and promised less for her hopes than variableness and reserve would have done.

Only a fortnight ago she had been plunged into absolute despair. He had promised to escort her and her cousins to a village festival a little way up the river; they waited for him in vain, and an escort having presented itself in the person of Fritz Keiler, Käthe's betrothed, the girls dragged off the reluctant Hedwig without him, fearing they would miss the boat. An hour later, by another steamer, appeared the recusant Dahl-

mann linked arm-in-arm with the Herr Pfarrer, and serenely unconscious that there was anything wrong. Not till he caught sight of Hedwig's flushed and troubled countenance did his delinquency flash on his mind; then his contrition was sincere. How could he have been so remiss? He had been dining with his friend and had wholly forgotten his engagement. What could he do to make amends? Käthe and Luise upbraided him loudly; Hedwig spoke no word, but she drooped. His excuse rankled in her mind more than the offense; he had wholly forgotten it, and she had been living on the expectation for weeks. She said nothing to her cousins, but fretted in secret, and her hopes, ever ready to cling to smallest foothold, seemed at length to have nothing to fasten themselves to, and almost withered away.

Better perhaps if they had; but a few days later Dahlmann, still full of compunction, came up to the mill to make his peace. From the gate he caught sight of Hedwig alone in the orchard, and he went straight to her. She was busied in the homely occupation of hanging up the week's wash on lines between the apple trees, but she made a pretty picture, standing there with her arms raised to fasten up a pink petticoat, the dappled sun and shadow falling on her flaxen hair. The lush grass at her feet was full of large gray pansies, and red and white blossoms floated down from overhead. When she saw him coming she dropped her task and trembled, and the pink petticoat fluttered to the ground.

She was still brooding over her disappointment, and at the remorseful gentleness of his regrets she completely gave herself away; she let him see plainly how much it had meant to her, and why. He was touched—shaken out of his usual self-command, shocked at the harm he had unwittingly done, and when presently he kissed

the soft pink cheek, and promised to ask her aunt's consent to their betrothal, he thought he had done well.

If he were not in love he was quite honest in thinking himself so. He was an undemonstrative man, and fancied he had outgrown the age for imaginative ardor. He was a little stirred by her beauty, a little moved by the preference she had been unable to conceal, and smitten with compunction lest his unguarded fondness for the pretty child had implied more than he had at first intended. He was beginning to be tired of his loneliness, and to fancy that a wife would add to his comfort and happiness; and he imagined in Hedwig the ideal gentle domestic housewife he would prefer. If she had understood better the value of what he offered, in comparison with what she gave, she might have held back a little; but she had not the strength of mind to make any show of reluctance even; she accepted him, not with joy merely, but with absolute gratitude.

She sat a while to rest on the little bridge where the footway crossed the stream, now grown beyond the feasibility of stepping-stones. Herr Reichardt passed, looked at her and nodded, then began to climb the Pfaffensteg, which was a short cut over the hill to his house. Almost directly after she caught sight of a gleam of sunshine on a golden head, as Ehrenfried waved his hat to her.

He hastened to meet her, and thanked her for coming as he kissed her, but his eye was roving after the vanishing figure on the hillside.

"Surely that is the Herr Pfarrer. Wait for me one moment, love; I must speak to him." And he bounded up the path along which the black coat was disappearing. In a moment he had overtaken him.

"Anton, I have so much to tell you. I thought you would have come down to the boat to meet me."

"So I would, but I had a funeral which made me late,

and when I saw Hedwig I concluded I should be in the way. How is it to be?"

"I am to go, and as soon as possible; they are in a tremendous hurry. I am to send in my resignation at once, and his Majesty is going to have the authorities written to about providing a successor here without delay that I may not be obliged to go on another quarter. They want me to go to Blankenstadt as soon as ever I can get away, so as to be in training all the summer and ready to begin next season. Well, I must come and tell you all about it to-night; I must not keep Hedwig waiting now."

He ran off, and swung himself down by the rocks and saplings, startling Hedwig by dropping into the path in front of her while she was expecting him to come up from behind. She had walked on rather quickly, intending to appear as if she did not wish to be overtaken, and his alighting suddenly from the boughs of an alder rather disconcerted her effect.

"It was good of you to come all this way to meet me, little one," he said, catching hold of her arm. "Don't bustle on in such a hurry. I have some wonderful news for you."

"You had better go back to the Herr Pfarrer with it," she said stiffly, but with the sound of tears in her voice. "I can easily walk home by myself."

"Why, you foolish child." He turned her round and made her look at him. "Are you pretending to be vexed with me because I went off to exchange a word with him? I had no idea you were such an exacting little woman. Come; do you want to hear my news?"

He looked so handsome and so good-humored, she could not resist him, and her face melted into a smile. "Yes, I do, only——"

"Well, do you know what I went to Blankenstadt for?"

She looked at him breathlessly. "To sing before the King and Queen; they wanted to hear me."

"Ei bewahre!" Hedwig's eyes grew round. "Weren't you frightened?"

He laughed. "No; why should I be? They were very kind."

"Did you go to the Court?"

"No; Graf von Wenzel, the gentleman you saw the other night, was entertaining their Majesties at his house on Sunday afternoon: so I was to sing to them there privately, as they called it, though there were a lot of grand folks besides. After I had sung two or three things the Count presented me, and the King spoke most kindly."

"Oh, I say! And the Queen, what is she like? What had she on?"

"I am afraid I don't know. She did not look near so smart as some of the other ladies. They don't wear their robes and crowns in private life in these days, like the queens in the picture books."

"Of course. I am not so silly; only I thought she would have worn something handsome; on a Sunday too."

"Now for my great news. The upshot of it all is that they have offered me a post in the Blankenstadt Opera Company. They want me to go on three months' trial at the beginning of next season; then, if I succeed, they will give me an engagement for a term of years. What should you say to living in Blankenstadt, and seeing something of the world, little country mouse?"

She stopped short in the pathway. "I should hate it!" she cried vehemently. "Oh, Friedel, you surely would not accept it. Fancy throwing up your prospects here for a chance!"

"You have not much confidence in my powers, it seems," he said with a little annoyance.

"I have; but it might all come to nothing."

"I have guarded against that. Of course I did not see my way to relinquishing my post here except for a certainty, and they naturally would not promise me a permanent engagement till they saw how I should do; but the King was so bent upon it that he has promised, if the three months' trial should not prove satisfactory, to get me an appointment similar to what I give up here. After that there was no more to be said." He stopped and sighed. It sounded cold and dry, but the joy and pride with which he had hastened home seemed to have hidden themselves; he had nothing but bare facts.

"You have decided, then?" She did think he ought to have told her first.

"Yes; and I shall have to go to Blankenstadt, as soon as ever I can get a substitute here, so as to be in training for two or three months. There is another thing," he went on after a pause. "Of course this changes all my plans: you know I spoke of this summer for our marriage; but it would be hardly wise to marry before I am fairly started. Should you mind if we put it off till next year?"

"I am in no hurry to leave home." She spoke in a choking voice. It was true she would not have minded the delay; courting days are sweet to a girl; but the perception that flashed upon her that his new prospects meant much more to him than his marriage smote her to the heart. They walked on for a few minutes in silence; Dahlmann annoyed with himself for having hurt her, and wishing he had put it differently; Hedwig revolving a resolution in her mind—a resolution that half frightened her, namely to test the worth of her happiness by a desperate venture. The silence grew irksome; a thing which should not happen between lovers, which never does happen between two who understand each other.

Then Hedwig took her courage in both hands, and made a plunge. She stood still, and turned so as to face him.

"Ehrenfried," she began with a resolute manner, but a shaking voice, "do you love me really?"

He stopped too and turned to her, a smile curving the stern corners of his mouth. She looked so very pretty, with her anxious, grave eyes fixed on him, and her ruffled flaxen head leaning against the wall of dark rock behind her. He took her hand, and answered her in the tone in which one might answer a child who puts a similar question, while he looked gently down at her:

"Of course I do, little sweetheart; why?"

"Then if you do, will you do something for my sake? Give up this horrid singing and stay in the Lindenthal, and let us be happy and content as we had planned."

He dropped her hand. "I don't think you quite know what you are asking me," he said gravely, and then paused. She stood in an agony of suspense, watching his face, her hands nervously twisting her handkerchief into a rope.

"Tell me," he said after a moment, "what makes this so distasteful to you?"

"If you cared for me you wouldn't want a reason," she murmured under her breath. He did not speak; and she went on rather breathlessly, "Aunt says it is a bad, dangerous life, and opera singers are always an unprincipled set."

"I wonder how many opera singers your aunt has known."

"Oh, Friedel, don't joke about it," she cried reproachfully. "I can't understand how you, who have always been so good, can think it right to devote yourself to a sinful, worldly amusement."

He began to get provoked.

"It seems to me," he said, "that the less people know the more they want to dictate. Don't you think I may be the best judge of the ordering of my own life? But if your scrupulous little conscience is uneasy, you had better talk to the Herr Pfarrer about it: I am no hand at expounding things."

"Ah, I knew it!" she exclaimed with bitterness.

"Knew it? knew what? What do you mean?"

"I knew he had talked you into this; I felt sure of it."

Hedwig had an instinctive jealousy of Reichardt: her temperament was one which would have made her dislike a dog which Dahlmann fondled. He looked annoyed as he answered: "I talked it over with him certainly. He did not urge me one way or the other; but if I needed advice, I don't know where better I could seek it."

"Everyone is not so taken up with the Herr Pfarrer as you are. Aunt says he does not preach the Gospel; she does not think him nearly so spiritually minded as the pastor at Lenzdorf."

"We will not discuss Herr Reichardt, if you please, Hedwig. He is very dear to me, and I don't choose to hear the criticisms of people who are not worthy——" He broke off. "Well, is that your only plea against the opera—a fear for my morals?"

He was vexed, or he would have put his question more gently.

"How hard you are," she said, beginning to walk on.

"No, I won't say any more: I see it is no use."

For a little while neither spoke; then, switching the tall heads of the rushes that fringed the brook, he said: "Look here, Hedwig, I don't want to take advantage of you; I see you think I have acted unfairly by you, and perhaps you are right. A week ago when I spoke to you, my prospects were very different—less dazzling,

perhaps, but more secure, and more what you seem to prefer. Our betrothal has not yet been formally announced. If you choose to cancel your promise to me I shall hold you blameless. Do not be afraid to speak out."

She flung up her hands to her face with a low cry. Every vestige of color had left her cheeks. All through she had been stung by the consciousness that her test had failed utterly, and she had not the courage to act upon the knowledge. Now the moment had come, and she could not give him up. She turned upon him.

"How can you be so cruel? Do you think it was because I liked your position I accepted you?"

He was startled at the effect of his words. "No, Liebchen, no; I had no such thought; only if the idea of a town life makes you miserable——"

"It is not that," she broke in, his quiet manner exasperating her more and more. "You make me miserable, pretending to care for me, and then casting me off. You only think of your singing; you don't think of me. You don't care for my happiness. Go, then. You will find plenty of women in Blankenstadt—actresses and people, who will suit you far better."

Dahlmann had a placid temper, but he was losing it fast.

"If that is the opinion you have of me—that I am a selfish brute, regardless of your happiness, and utterly untrustworthy, the sooner we part the better. We have been mistaken in each other."

He felt that he at any rate had been mistaken in her. Was this the demure, gentle girl whose modest demeanor had always so pleased him? What had become of all that meek devotion to himself on which he had so securely counted? Her vehement reproaches amazed and bewildered him. She was no less astonished at her own

outburst. It seemed as though she were carried out of herself by a force she could neither understand nor control. That she should have the courage to assail a man she feared as she did her lover was no less astonishing than that she could be so bitter against one she loved. In truth she was driven frantic by the struggle against a consciousness she would not admit. If he did not know what was lacking between them, she did; but the more clearly she realized she had not the substance of what she craved, the more despairingly she clung to the shadow. She clutched at his arm in an agony of sobs that for a moment choked her voice.

"Oh, stop!" she gasped, as her breath came back. "What have I said? I didn't mean it. Oh, Friedel, forgive me."

He was concerned and distressed at her agitation. He led her back to the bank and made her sit down, not saying much till she had in some degree regained her composure. Then she began again:

"Oh, do forgive me. Indeed I never meant that you were selfish or—or anything. Take back what you said."

"You mean about our parting? But, Hedwig, if you feel I cannot make you happy; if my undertaking different work alters everything——"

"No, no, it shall not. I will not mind anything if only you will not give me up." Then, as he remained a moment silent—"Oh, you are cruel to me. You know it is only because I love you so much, I cannot bear anything that takes you from me. It is hard you should have changed to me so quickly."

"I haven't changed; there is no change in me. When I spoke of canceling our engagement, it was because I thought my altered prospects did not please you. If you are satisfied we will say no more."

She looked at him, silent and wistful. He could not

help speaking coldly. He was perplexed, chilled, discouraged. He felt there was something wrong, yet he could not be cruel to the poor little sobbing creature beside him. He turned to her and took her hand.

"My dear," he said, "we will not have any more of these discussions. You know my mind on the matter now, and since yours is to stick to me in spite of not liking my new trade, I will do my best to make you happy."

He drew her toward him and kissed her, and she tried to feel content.

She slipped away from his side presently, and went down to the brook to dip her handkerchief and bathe her swollen eyelids. He sat still on the bank, sunk in silence, his eyes fixed on the brown water as it came bubbling over the stones at his feet. She came back in a minute and knelt down in front of him, laying her hand on his knee to attract his attention. "Dear, I am ready, now. Aren't we going home? What are you thinking about so deeply?"

He rose. "Come, then," he said, but he did not attempt to answer her question.

Late that evening the two friends sat smoking in the parsonage arbor. The gray summer dusk stole softly up from the valley, and as the dew fell, the heavy scent of the lilacs came up so strongly as almost to overpower the fragrance of two long-stemmed pipes. Far below the lights of the village twinkled through the trees, and the sounds of barking dogs, crying children, or an occasional snatch of song from the open door of an alehouse, blended confusedly together, seemed to make the quiet up there more quiet by contrast. Each man had a large tankard of mai-trank before him, and Dahlmann was taking his ease luxuriously with his legs up in a chair. There was much to tell, but the conversation languished;

his narrative was brief and fragmentary, and he seemed more intent on counting the bats that kept flitting noiselessly out from the roof and wheeling dizzily before them, than on relating his adventures. At last Reichardt lost patience.

"Why, Ehren, what makes you so uncommunicative? I thought you would have been brimming over with interesting things. Are you so tired?"

"I suppose I am rather. It seems as if it had all happened a week ago at least, instead of this morning."

"Ah, this morning; I want to hear about that. So they tried you on the stage. How did you like that?"

"Oh, it's a glorious place to sing in. At first it looked an enormous space to fill, but I found it quite easy. We went through bits of 'Siegfried' and the 'Götterdämmerung.'"

"With any of the other singers?"

"Yes, with two or three of the men: the first soprano was away singing at Berlin. I want to see her, for from various things Graf von Wenzel has said, I imagine my success will depend a good deal on her favor, and by all accounts she seems to have rather an uncertain temper. They say she is plain, too. Fancy a plain Elsa!"

"You have never seen her then?"

"No; she was only engaged last winter. Most of the company are new to me; there have been many changes. Rauch I remember. She is aging perceptibly; she used to be a very handsome woman. And Pauli too; he is one of the former set. I well recollect longing to sweep him from his place and stand one hour in his shoes, and now——"

He puffed away in silence for a minute or two; then his friend reached out a hand and laid it on his shoulder.

"Ehren, are you quite happy about this? Don't be hurried into it if your mind misgives you."

"But it doesn't. I don't think I could draw back from it now. It doesn't seem like a new thing, but as if it had always been waiting for me out of sight."

"Then what is the matter with you?"

Dahlmann knocked the ashes out of his pipe before replying.

"The truth is I have been worried and upset since I came home."

"Already!" said Reichardt to himself. Aloud he observed, "Ah, Hedwig does not fancy your coming out in a new character, I suppose?"

"No, she doesn't." He leaned back and stroked his beard musingly. "Anton, I am afraid I don't understand women very well."

His friend smiled. "I don't suppose you do. No man does till he has bought his experience—and paid for it. Give her time: she is a timid little soul; she will like the idea well enough when she is used to it. I should not wonder, though, if she resents not having been consulted beforehand."

When Dahlmann was gone, the pastor walked up and down on the top of his rampart for a while.

"Well, well, well," he said to himself, "there isn't much comfort in saying 'I told you so'; I would a great deal rather have been wrong."

IV.

THE grass was not suffered to grow under Dahlmann's feet. Almost before the Lindenthal had ceased to wonder, open-mouthed, at the marvelous stroke of luck that had befallen the village schoolmaster, a lank-haired, blue-spectacled young man was in possession of his desk and cane, and the master himself was away at Blankenstadt, going to school to various professors of fencing and deportment and the histrionic art. So far as singing was concerned there was little to learn; nature and Dietrich had done all that was needful there. The voice was in perfect training; all he wanted was practice in pitching it so as to reach every portion of the building, and managing it in all sorts of impossible attitudes.

Through the long hot summer days he worked steadily on, making up by his quiet persistence for the lack of suppleness which was the chief fault his instructors found in him. Many of his lessons were taken in the theater, and much of his time was spent in ranting about the wide solitary stage, addressing himself in moving accents to the tenantless boxes, or clasping the empty air in a passionate embrace, while the sunshine slanted in dusty beams across the floor. During the summer months the opera was closed, and all the people connected with it scattered to the four winds, but he very often had an audience of one; for Graf von Wenzel had a country house a little way down the river, and frequently came in to see for himself how his *protégé* was getting on. Sometimes he would lurk in the royal box, sometimes in a stall, leveling a critical pair of opera

glasses at the solitary Lohengrin or Tannhäuser who had possession of the stage.

On one occasion when a fencing lesson was in progress, Dahlmann excited an unexpected burst of applause—more than one pair of hands could have executed—from behind the curtain of a box. It was a feat of strength that so pleased the unseen spectators. Having slain his adversary, he picked up the supposed corpse, personated by the fencing master, a man of some weight and size, and throwing him over his shoulder, walked off to the wings with him as easily as most men would carry a sack of wheat.

It was one of the King's brothers, who had dropped in and joined the Intendant and the Kapellmeister, the latter just back from a month's holiday. The three walked out together, leaving the performer practicing a thrust in tierce with which his instructor had been dissatisfied.

"That was very fine," said the prince, laughing, as they reached the corridor, "he will make a worthy Siegfried. Rather an improvement on Pauli, eh, Kritzler?"

"Certainly, your Highness; he is a good deal taller and stronger. It is to be hoped he mayn't kill somebody by mistake one of these days. He takes himself too seriously."

"Pshaw!" said the Intendant. "But I wish your Highness had come in while he was singing."

They both bowed to the Prince as he crossed the square to the Palace; then Graf von Wenzel turned to his companion anxiously:

"Are you dissatisfied, Kritzler? Don't you think he is coming on?"

"Oh, coming on well enough in the tomfoolery of this morning, I dare say. How can I tell about him till I have heard him sing?"

"Well, I don't think you will find any falling off there. I was astonished to find how conversant he is already with most of Wagner's great parts."

"H'm. Amateur work," grumbled the Kapellmeister.

"Dietrich's pupil, remember," responded the other. "What makes you so prejudiced?"

"I am not prejudiced: but it strikes me, Herr Graf, that you are all so carried away by the man's strength and good looks that you fancy you hear a second Heilbronner. If he had been one he would not have stayed in the Lindenthal till now."

"You old fool," said the Intendant, clapping him on the shoulder. "My man sings divinely, and if he looks a Lohengrin or a Siegfried to boot, I am ready to thank the generous gods who threw him in my way."

"Well, well, I dare say he will flare up like a comet and carry us through this season; the public likes something new." And, still growling, the old Kapellmeister walked away.

September brought back most of the opera company, and rehearsals soon began. The residents, both German and foreign, were flocking into winter quarters, and at the end of the month the opera would reopen. Blankenstadt was not so much a tourist resort as a regular colony of English, Americans, and Russians. They came, especially the English, in crowds, and either liking it better or finding it cheaper than their own country, sat down and stayed, elbowing out the natives, much as their Norman progenitors had elbowed out the Saxons of old. Presently they built them a church and established a tennis club, after which they felt quite at home. They sneered a good deal at the manners and customs of their entertainers, and were apt to fall foul of the police regulations to which they were unaccustomed in their own country; on the whole, perhaps, they were hardly popu-

lar; but then they were a mighty support to the opera and other entertainments, so the citizens growled at them, took their money, and made no resistance to the invasion.

Among these good folks there was great excitement on the subject of the new tenor, and most romantic tales of his origin were rife, and of the manner in which Von Wenzel had discovered him. The lists for the first week's performances were out, and still his name did not appear. People got impatient, and began to say that he was found to be a failure after all; that his voice had broken under training, or he suffered from stage fright, and that the Intendant was moving heaven and earth to get Heilbronner after all. Meanwhile no Wagner was produced: an old favorite and one or two modern trifles were given, in which Pauli sustained the leading *rôle*.

The subject of these legends, was, however, quietly at work all the time preparing himself for the production of Lohengrin, which was fixed for the second of October, and making acquaintance with some of his new colleagues. Though he was not to appear just yet, his attendance was required at all the rehearsals that he might gain some familiarity with affairs behind the scenes when the opera was in working order.

On the first of these occasions the under Kapellmeister, who was going to conduct, stowed him away in a retired nook in the wings, from which he could see everything without attracting much attention. He sat there silent, watching with the curiosity of a child as the singers came flocking on, exchanging greetings and remarks. It was an undress rehearsal, so there was no dispersing to dressingrooms; everyone stood about in the wings, waiting for their call. It reminded him of a flock of starlings; still more perhaps of his own scholars before the bell rang. What a babel it was! They were nearly all Germans, and

seemed homely, friendly folks, all on intimate terms with one another, for the scraps of conversation that came to his ears were full of the little jokes and allusions, incomprehensible to an outsider, that spring up among people thrown together in a common occupation.

His great anxiety was to make out the English soprano. That large woman with roses in her bonnet, he thought he remembered as Frau Rauch; besides, she was far too old. Possibly that tall, round-faced girl with a dimple, to whom she was speaking; but she hardly looked important enough, and certainly did not give herself the airs of a leading lady. Not that other with dark languishing eyes, for she was decidedly pretty, and he was sure he had been told that Miss Arrowsmith was plain. In the midst of his speculations a bell rang, and the crowd fell into their places with far more celerity than his boys would have done. Kapellmeister Braun was evidently a disciplinarian.

The opera was one that did not interest him, but the performers did. Presently two of the ladies, coming off the stage on his side, stopped to exchange a few remarks under cover of a loud bass solo that was in progress and conveyed to him the information he had been wishing for.

"So Miss Arrowsmith is not back yet?"

"I don't suppose she will come back till the court do. The King and the princes are still away at the autumn maneuvers; the rest of Blankenstadt is not good enough for her to sing to."

"Oh, my dear, that is not it; don't you know she has vowed she won't come back till they get Heilbronner for her?"

"She thinks she can do what she likes with the Herr Intendant. She treated Pfeiffer abominably; there was a regular intrigue to get rid of him."

•

"She won't get her own way this time; the Herr Graf is too much taken up with his new toy."

"It was a ridiculous thing to do, though, to bring in a man out of the wilds whom nobody had ever heard of, and think they could make a singer of him in a couple of months—quite a common, illiterate person."

"He can hardly be that, since he was a schoolmaster. But what do you think Kritzler told me about him?"

At this point Dahlmann, who had been growing very uncomfortable, as it dawned on him that he was the subject of conversation, pushed back his chair with a loud scroop, and the two turned round with a start.

"Oh, good gracious!" cried the little fat woman who had been the last speaker, "who is there? Is that you, Lortzing?"

"It is I, Dahlmann, Madam." And he rose, towering over the two tattlers, looking a little confused and a little angry.

"I beg your pardon, I am sure. I was not aware there was anyone behind me." Her companion giggled affectedly. "I had no idea you were on to-day."

"I am not. The Intendant wished me to attend rehearsal." He bowed and was moving away, but she detained him.

"Though our acquaintance began rather inauspiciously, you must let me introduce myself; I am Frau Pappelheim, leader of the chorus, and this is Fräulein Brenner, our first contralto. You must not think, if you did overhear a little greenroom gossip, that we mean to be unfriendly. We are very glad to make your acquaintance."

He replied with a formal bow, and Frau Pappelheim whispered to her friend: "My dear, how could you say he was illiterate and common! He is the most alarmingly stately person I ever came across in my life."

Before she could carry her overtures any farther, the stage-manager, becoming aware that something of the nature of conversation was going on, cried, "Order, ladies, order!" and the acquaintance was for the moment abruptly extinguished.

Unresponsive as Dahlmann had been, Frau Pappelheim was far too much pleased to have been the first to unearth him to let him slip; at the next pause she came bustling back with her husband and the second tenor to introduce to him. This last was a pleasant-looking young fellow. He held out his hand with a frank smile.

"I am very glad to meet you," he said; "I was so sorry to miss you when you were here in the spring. We are looking forward with great eagerness to hear your Lohengrin."

"Don't you believe it," said Pappelheim, who was standing by. "You and he ought to be deadly foes. I brought him up expressly that I might see the fun."

Chaff was a language the schoolmaster did not understand. He turned his grave eyes from one to the other with a look that made Lortzing burst out laughing.

"Oh, you know they put me on for Lohengrin and Tannhäuser last winter, and nearly killed me. Nature never meant me or my voice for such big things. Don't imagine I grudge you the post. With such a grind life is not worth having at the price. If you had not come they would have had to get somebody else. I am lamentably wanting in ambition."

"I am very glad you don't look on me as standing in your light. I suppose the work is pretty hard?"

"Tremendously. By the way, I hope you are strong; you look it."

"Strong as a horse, thanks. Why, do you expect me to break down under it?"

"I am afraid my solicitude was selfish. Most likely I

shall have to understudy you, and if you are given to collapsing with sore throats, what is to become of me? It was bad enough to be Pfeiffer's understudy, but if I have to fill your shoes I shall have to grow. Ade. There is Braun scowling in our direction, and I have to go on in a moment."

The next to greet him was a man he had met at the Intendant's the first time, and among these strange faces he seemed quite an old friend. It was Armbrecht, the genial baritone.

"So, Dahlmann," said he, "you have cast in your lot with us. You will be a great acquisition; we have been weak in tenors lately."

"Thanks; you are very kind. I wish you would tell me one thing. I overheard some gossip just now; they say the soprano will not come back unless I am got rid of. Is there any truth in it?"

"Not a bit of it. My dear fellow, you must not listen to a word they say here. Her mother is ill. She'll be back in a day or two. But you must not be surprised," he added, "if you don't find her very easy to get on with. You must try and stand well with her though."

"Are you talking of Die Arrowsmith?" said a short round man who was passing by. He was the old first tenor, and had one foot, if not in the grave, at least upon the shelf. "She ought to be satisfied this time. She is one of the daughters of Anak, you must know," turning to Dahlmann; "so the Intendant's chief care was to secure the necessary physical qualifications. I am sure he has succeeded." He passed on with a little sniggering laugh.

"Don't mind him," said Armbrecht. "Size is rather a sore point with Pauli."

Dahlmann began to hate the idea of the first soprano; he loathed the notion of depending in any way upon a

woman's whims, and it seemed to be the general opinion that he would stand or fall by her favor, and still she kept away. The first rehearsals of Lohengrin took place, but her part was taken by her understudy, Lotta Schmidt, a graceful girl with a sweet, flexible voice, who made in his opinion a fairly adequate Elsa. About his rendering of Lohengrin opinions differed. On one occasion Graf von Wenzel stopped Armbrecht as they were coming out to know what he thought. He had great respect for the baritone's judgment, and the Kapellmeister was still somewhat discouraging.

"Well, he certainly can sing divinely, but I own I always want to poke him up a bit. He is a fine-looking fellow too. He looks the part better than ever Heilbronner did."

"You don't think we shall ever make an actor of him?"

"I don't say that. With training——"

"Oh, training: he has had plenty of that; almost too much, I sometimes fancy. I believe Dragenz has coached all the spontaneousness out of him. And then he is so hopelessly conscientious; he does exactly as he is told in the most painstaking way. Ah! if you could have heard him sing Tristan in the dusk of that little dingy parsonage! The stage seems to have frozen him."

"You are an enthusiast, Herr Graf."

"Am I? Well, I want the fellow to succeed: I shall be horribly disappointed if he does not. His singing is bound to get a favorable verdict from the critics, but if he does not carry the public——" The Intendant shook his head despondently and walked away.

V.

A FEW days later Dahlmann received a note from the Intendant, desiring him to meet the newly returned first soprano at his house on a certain morning. She would not appear until the dress rehearsal which was to take place the day before the production of *Lohengrin*; but she wished to make his acquaintance, and also to try over some portions of the second act with him. He wished devoutly she had seen fit to stay away altogether till it was over. He had got used to Fräulein Schmidt, and it was hard on him to have to accommodate himself to a different style at the very last moment.

He was punctual to the appointed hour, but she was beforehand, as he perceived by the presence of a red parasol in the hall. As he entered the music room he saw a tall girl in a dark dress with a little crimson toque on her head, standing in the window turning over the score. She looked up abruptly as Graf von Wenzel came forward to present him, and he felt he was being measured and taken in by a pair of such brilliant eyes that it was a minute or two before he could realize what sort of face they belonged to.

Report had not belied her; she was not at all a pretty woman, and Dahlmann, though he had been prepared for the fact, could not avoid a sensation of regret that he should have to play *Lohengrin* to an Elsa so unlike his inward vision of that fair princess. She was so dark, so thin: fair, soft-looking Lotta, though by no means coming up to his ideal, was far nearer to it. Miss Arrow-smith had the air of being older than her three and

twenty years; she was excessively tall, and her figure, in the little English-looking blouse she wore, struck him as meager, used as he was to the amplitude of German types. Her complexion was rather pale and dark; but at any rate she did not consider it necessary to repair the ravages of stage paint by any make-up, as most of the opera ladies did, and that scored in her favor. Her chin was long, and her features strongly marked, but it was the eyes that gave character to her face, not by their color or shape, but by their peculiar luster—a luster rather cold and bright, like the sparkle of a frosty morning. Her manner was slightly imperious and brusque, and her speaking voice peculiar, pitched in an unusual key. She spoke German fluently enough, but slowly and with a finish only acquired in the North.

She did not say much, and evidently expected to go at once to business; so Graf von Wenzel seated himself at the piano and began the accompaniment. At first Dahlmann was not sure that he liked Miss Arrowsmith's voice any better than he did her face: it was of immense compass, and gave the listener a sense of restrained power and volume; but to his ear it lacked the sweetness that usually belongs to a high soprano, though on the other hand it was wholly free from thinness and shrillness on high notes. There was a certain metallic ring that was peculiar: it had more of the quality of a boy's than of a woman's voice.

Yet it grew upon him by slow degrees, and when he felt it twining with his own in the unapproachable harmonies of the love scene, it gave him a sense of inward delight that uttered itself in notes of redoubled strength and beauty. The Intendant nodded his head two or three times; his man was doing himself justice.

The practice was a long one, and directly it was over Dahlmann had to hurry away to the theater, where

Dragenz was waiting to put him through his paces once more. He could not gather whether he were approved or not; her nonchalant manner gave him no clew. As soon as the door closed behind him, Von Wenzel turned eagerly to Miss Arrowsmith:

"Well?" he said.

She pulled on her long gloves slowly.

"I suppose you mean, what do I think of Herr Dahlmann? I think he seems to have a very good voice."

The Count's face fell. "Is that all?" he said in a rather crestfallen tone.

She laughed teasingly. "What more do you expect me to say? You and the King rave so much about your new toy, there are really no raptures left for anybody else. He has quite cut me out with you both."

"Nonsense! You are not going to be jealous of him, surely? Now, you know, there was nothing you wanted but to be fitly supported. I thought your voices blended charmingly, and I am sure he is big enough in all conscience. Pray, what have you to complain of now?"

"My good friend, I am not complaining. I think he may do very well. But seriously now, did you expect me to go into ecstasies about your village schoolmaster?"

The Intendant gave a little stamp of vexation.

"Well, of course, if you are going to take a dislike to the man,—an unreasonable prejudice, I call it,—it is all up with his prospects here. You have driven away four tenors at least with your whims, but, upon my word, I don't see why you should sacrifice a fifth."

He fumed about the room, and Miss Arrowsmith, who had turned to the mirror to put on her veil, looked over her shoulder at him.

"Don't exaggerate," she said, "three at the outside. You know you would none of you have stood Pauli if

I had not objected. Shall I ever forget him in 'Tannhäuser'! He crowed like a cock."

"Well," he said, coming back and standing in front of her, "you know very well that in a critical beginning like this you have it very much in your hands to make or mar: if you choose the latter, I think you will regret it for many reasons. I should be very sorry for the man himself; he deserves success, and if you make it difficult or unattainable for him, you will be doing him a grave injustice. He is not only gifted but hardworking, and the two things do not often go together. You know very well you were consulted from the first, and I was anxious you should have an opportunity of hearing him before we engaged him; but you would not set aside your own plans to come when we had him down for trial. I appeal to your generosity—to your sense of fair play."

She looked at him, and a smile stole over her face that quite altered its character. "Dear Herr Graf," she said, "I did not mean to be nasty really; only I could not resist teasing you a little. You know, we English cannot schwarm as you do. I like the simplicity of the man. I will do all I can to help him on: if he fails, it shall not be my fault. There is my hand upon it."

"Then my mind is at rest. After all, my dear young lady," he added, as he accompanied her to the door, "you must confess that it is very much to your advantage to befriend him. You and the tenor are so mutually dependent that it is wise for you to encourage one who shows so much promise. Then, you must admit his looks are in his favor."

"Yes, but can he act? That is what I should like to know."

"Well, of course you must not expect the finish and experience of a man who has been on the boards all his life; but he is painstaking—very painstaking."

"H'm; we shall see. Anyhow, it is something to be thankful for that he is tall. I shall never forget what I went through, crawling about almost on my knees with that little wretch Pauli. And then there was that terrible man who came from Hanover to be tried, with a voice like a pea-hen—I forget his name—I could have picked him up and put him in my pocket."

"Well, I only hope and trust this time you will be satisfied; you and the public too. And I don't know which is the hardest task-mistress," he added, as he shut the door behind her.

Anybody who knows the difficulty with which foreign talent finds admission into modern German opera may be surprised that Clare Arrowsmith should have won a foremost place in one of its strongholds, and in truth she found herself in a somewhat solitary and invidious position, though her musical training had been entirely in the land of her adoption; for their long residence had not been able to eradicate insular prejudice against German ways with either her or her mother. In spite of her Greek name, and her Greek second husband, Madame Malaxa was English to the heart's core, though her lot had been cast in many lands since her girlhood, spent in the precincts of an English cathedral. She clung to her English fireside and English habits in spite of an exile of nearly five and thirty years. Her early married life had been passed in India, and there she had borne and lost many children. She returned a widow, with one little girl, her latest born, but before she had been long settled in the neighborhood of her old home she was persuaded to make a second matrimonial venture, though now no longer young; for she was one of those women in whom men find a perennial charm. This time it was a Greek Count, and in one of the Ionian islands she and Clare spent a few happy though not untroubled years. Madame

Malaxa's fortune, which was considerable, disappeared in a marble quarry which was unluckily discovered on her husband's property, and at his death she found herself dependent on her little daughter, on whom the first husband's money had been settled. On this small income of Clare's they might have lived in modest comfort, but the girl, ambitious and conscious of unusual powers, was determined to do something for herself. She persuaded her mother to take her to Germany, that her voice, even at fourteen giving remarkable promise, might have the benefit of thorough professional training from the outset. Concert singing and giving lessons were what the mother had in view, and it was something of a shock to her to discover that nothing short of the operatic stage was her daughter's ambition. Various professors were consulted, and their verdict was the same: not only Clare's voice, but her dramatic talent, was so exceptional that to tie her down to a comparatively obscure career would be to waste a rare and brilliant gift. The Countess, though rather dismayed at the prospect, consented, for Clare was passionately bent on it. It was with her something more than the desire, becoming so common among women, for an independent career: she had the intense need for self-expression in the line where her powers lay, which is the almost invariable accompaniment of a streak of true genius, and she got her way. She told her mother truly that if she were never to sing in an opera, life for her would not be worth living.

Her voice, her training, her personality alike fitted her to be an exponent of the serious music-drama, and Blankenstadt, one of the earliest cradles of Wagner's operas, engaged her for a term of years, not long after her brilliant *début* at Frankfurt. Her fame had been quickly won, and she stood already almost at the top of her profession. She was a great favorite with the old

King and with the Intendant, and her unpopularity with her colleagues gave her the less concern as she was absorbed in her work and of a rather unsociable disposition. She took it for granted that the elderly first soprano, whom she had gradually supplanted, must of necessity regard her with disfavor; nor did the antagonism of Herr Pauli surprise her. She was sorry for him; it was hard for an old favorite to see his laurels fading; but she really could not sing with him, and he probably was aware that a word from her to the Intendant had caused his withdrawal into the cold shade of minor parts.

Miss Arrowsmith and her mother had a charming flat in the Finkenwiese, overlooking the long, narrow garden-like plantation, with green alleys and rippling fountains, which connects the town with the royal park; and here in a pretty balconied room, overhanging the trees, Countess Malaxa was eagerly awaiting her daughter's return. People who knew the mother often remarked how narrowly the daughter had missed being pretty, for they were wonderfully alike, and in her young days the Countess must have been quite lovely. The features which in Miss Arrowsmith were over-emphasized, in her were smaller and more delicate, and even at sixty the complexion of the elder lady was fairer and showed traces of a not long vanished bloom. The bright eyes, which were so much alike and full of expression in both, were set off with the mother by snow-white hair worn full over a cushion. She was not nearly so tall as her daughter, but slender as a girl, and looked as if she might once have had just the same supple agility of movement.

She looked up eagerly as the door opened: she was quite as much excited as Clare about the advent of the new tenor.

"Well, what is he like?" she cried. "Will he do?"

"What, the pedagogue? Oh, I think so. Do you know, I think I shall like him very much. The Herr Graf did not say a word too much about his voice; it is simply superb."

"And is he presentable? For really I can't help feeling that is essential. For my part, I never can enter into the music of Tannhäuser when he is presented to the eye as a little butter-tub like Pauli."

"Frivolous little mother! Well, you may make your mind easy on that score: Herr Dahlmann is quite beautiful, and on a grand scale that will rather gain than lose on the stage. It is lucky I am tall, for he will dwarf most of us."

"Beautiful! That is a strong word, and from you."

"It is the only one. You could not call him handsome or good-looking, you feel inclined to talk of him as if he were a child or a dog—or a statue. There is something of the child about him in spite of a certain stateliness. He has great wide-open, blue eyes that look straight at you."

"He is not at all common-looking, then?"

"Common! By no means. There is a sort of rusticity in his manner, and he is stiff—oh, very stiff. I should fancy he will not be easy to act with: Lotta says he takes your hand as if it were a hot potato."

"Well, at any rate," said her mother with an anxious look, "I do hope you won't have the annoyance with him you had with Pfeiffer."

"No, thank Heaven! He is quite a different sort of man. Besides, he is married; he had a fat gold ring on."

"Engaged, more likely. You know they wear their rings beforehand. We should have heard of a wife if there had been one."

Clare was picking up her gloves and parasol, which she

had thrown down on the sofa; she stopped beside her mother's chair.

"Dearest," she said, touching the silver hair, "do you know you are getting to fuss like a hen with a duckling, and you never used to. Forget that Pfeiffer affair, as I shall. Such things rarely happen to me. Your ugly duckling is well able to take care of herself."

"I know you are discretion itself, but you are thrown with these men under such peculiar conditions; I don't half like it."

VI.

As the day approached for the production of his "find" before a critical Blankenstadt audience, whose curiosity had been whetted by rumor to the last pitch of expectancy, the Intendant became a prey to the most acute nervousness, actually aggravated by the unshaken tranquillity of the man himself; though, in truth, the tenor's frame of mind was precisely the most desirable, if only it could be trusted to last. Fussy by nature himself, Von Wenzel called Dahlmann vain and stolid. There was more justice in the latter charge than the former; it was less vanity that upheld him than a calm taking for granted that he knew his part and was able to perform it. He had done it several times already, and that there should be any difference between singing to a full theater and an empty one hardly even occurred to him. He had never yet undertaken any task he had not found himself equal to carrying through. Why should this be an exception?

If he feared anything, it was the dress rehearsal and Miss Arrowsmith: those bright eyes of hers did inspire him with a lurking uneasiness. For the few hearers the Intendant had been unable to exclude he cared not a whit, and he never even noticed that the King was peeping from behind the curtains of the royal box, having been unable to restrain his curiosity till the morrow.

The first act went without a hitch, but at its conclusion Graf von Wenzel, who had been watching from the front, and had been sent for to the royal box, came and tapped at Miss Arrowsmith's dressing-room door. Madame Malaxa

admitted him. Clare, ready dressed in her heavy silver brocade, was seated before the glass while the dresser was twisting ropes of pearl into her dark plaits.

"Well, Herr Graf, are we to congratulate you?" asked the elder lady, noting his discontented face.

He pulled his mustache. "That is just what I want to know. What do you say?"

He looked at Clare, but her mother answered.

"Oh, it is a fine voice; a splendid voice."

"Yes, yes; the voice is all right; he fills the theater well. But, Miss Arrowsmith, do, I entreat, infuse a little life into him. He is tame. His Majesty is disappointed."

"I told you how it would be," said Clare, pulling her head away from the dresser; "I knew he could not act; he is too uncouth; he handles me as if I were a gun that might go off. Pray, how am I to infuse life into him if he won't look at me? He is a great deal more likely to infuse heaviness into me."

The Intendant laughed a little ruefully. "What do you think his Majesty said—'Poor Miss Arrowsmith! Hard on her to have to fling herself into the arms of a clothes-prop.' Perhaps the public may rouse him to-morrow night; but I doubt it."

"You are too greedy, Herr Graf," said Countess Malaxa; "you want everything. You must be content with a magnificent voice and a fine presence. That will carry off a good deal, and I dare say the stiffness will wear off in time. No doubt the poor man is shy."

"Shy! Not he. I never met a more thoroughly self-satisfied man in my life. He does not know what nervousness is; he is as stolid as a peasant."

Yet, though she knew nothing about him, Madame Malaxa's insight had gone straight to the point. A shyness that was wholly new and strange had invaded that

stolidity of Dahlmann's. He felt as if he were in a dream when Elsa darted through the crowd of her accusers and flung herself at his feet, half hidden in a cloud of black hair that, bound only by a golden fillet, fell almost to her knees. This was surely not Miss Arrowsmith, not that angular young woman in a red bonnet whom he had met yesterday at Graf von Wenzel's. He felt bewildered, and had some ado to maintain that level calm of demeanor which gave such offense to his critics. His hand shook a little when he had to raise her from the ground, and felt the silky hair twining about his fingers, and he drew away from her with a sense of having taken an unwarrantable liberty, and that air which she described as treating her like a gun that might go off. It was very odd; he had never experienced anything of the sort in acting with Fräulein Schmidt; but then, to be sure, that had not been in dress rehearsal.

At the end of the scene in the bridal chamber, when the curtain went down, he stood for a moment looking at his colleague, a little breathless, a little confused, conscious that he had sung his best, conscious too of her dissatisfaction.

"I have displeased you," he said with the direct simplicity that always puzzled the Intendant. "You did not think that scene went as it should?"

She was on her way to her dressing room, but paused:

"I am sure you sang it extremely well; perhaps—well, never mind."

"Perhaps what?"

"I was only going to say that your acting seems a little forced and labored; and then it makes me labored too."

"I am sorry. I think I did it exactly as I have done at the practices. Will you tell me just what I do that is wrong."

"Nothing, oh, nothing," she cried, disarmed by his unexpected humility. "It is more what you don't do. It seems to want a little more spontaneous action. But, indeed, I am afraid I shall only do you harm with these random criticisms, and spoil your self-confidence. I wish I had not said anything."

"And I wish you would say a little more. I don't quite see where and how to alter."

"I can't go into it now," she said; "I must go and change my dress, and so must you. Come and see me this afternoon, and we will talk it over. No. 7 Finkenwiese. My mother will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

He accepted her invitation with grave politeness, but was inwardly a little astonished at it. In Germany an unmarried woman never invites a visit from a man; it would be considered a most forward thing to do, and Anglo-Saxon manners and customs, though rife enough in Blankenstadt, had not yet penetrated to the Lindenthal. However, he supposed it was all right; he had already encountered a good many ways that were new to him, and at the appointed hour he mounted the stairs to Madame Malaxa's flat, disguising his diffidence under a panoply of more than his usual stiffness.

He might be bold enough when it came to facing the general public, but he felt considerable apprehension about presenting himself before two ladies on so informal an invitation. He was completely unused to women, at any rate to women of the order to which Miss Arrow-smith and her mother belonged: neither his own mother, homely and stern in her manners, limited in her ideas, nor the womankind at the mill, seemed to have anything in common with the opera ladies, whose acquaintance he had hitherto scrupulously avoided, and he had a sensation of venturing into an unexplored country as the par-

lor-maid held back a heavy velvet *portière*, and he stepped across the threshold of this feminine abode, and received a strangely mingled impression. It was cushiony and soft, as soft as the little silver-haired lady who sat by the fire screening her face with a feather fan; it was sweet-smelling, for there were flowers everywhere; late roses and mignonette overpowering the more homely fragrance of coffee which stood on a little table with a dainty service of silver and Dresden china. But then there were books! Not merely a few novels and magazines scattered on the tables; one wall seemed nearly all books, and he wanted to go close and see their titles. The farther end of the room looked like out-of-doors, for there was an oriel window at the corner, draped with ivy grown inside in the pretty German fashion, with a balcony beyond overhanging the trees of the Finkenwiese, but across the other corner was a real English fireplace with an open grate, the coal fire sending out a warm dancing light into the chill October dusk.

Miss Arrowsmith, emerging from the dimness of the further window, received him cordially and presented him to her mother. No buckram could ever withstand the kindly influence of Madame Malaxa's eyes; his was laid aside almost without his being aware of it, and he was soon chatting away to her as if he had known her all his life. His great fear had been that he should not know what to talk to them about; Frau Rauch and Fräulein Brenner appeared to him to talk a language of their own with which he was unacquainted; but these new friends seemed to have read every book he most cared for, heard all the music he most longed to hear, and gave their opinions with a crisp originality that charmed him.

"Have you made many friends in the opera company here, mien Herr?" asked Madame Malaxa presently.

He shook his head. "Not yet. You know, I am quite an outsider."

"Then take my advice and remain so," said Miss Arrowsmith, holding out her hand for his cup. "I have always done so, and I find it pays."

"My dear," said her mother, "do you think it is quite fair to prejudice Herr Dahlmann?"

"Is it quite fair," she retorted, "to point out bogs and pitfalls to a traveler in a strange country? Oughtn't he to be left to find them out for himself?"

"It is a very strange country to me," said Dahlmann, "and I am grateful for landmarks."

"Well," pursued Clare, "you will find we are a little world of cliques. If you are on good terms with us, Frau Rauch won't know you; if you are friendly with her and the Pappelheims, the Intendant won't approve of you, while, if he is kind to you, you will have the whole set in league against you. Under the circumstances we may discount Herr Pauli, I think."

"I think so too."

"I find the simplest plan is to be civil to everybody and friends with nobody; otherwise you are safe to give yourself away."

"I am afraid you will make Herr Dahlmann think he has come into a hornet's nest," said Madame Malaxa deprecatingly. "The truth is, my daughter and I have grown very unsociable; she works too hard to have much idle time for making friends, and you can imagine that in a little circle like this there is any amount of cabal and mischief-making, so we fancy ourselves as well out of it; but it does not tend to popularity."

"I don't think I am given to making friends very readily," he said with a passing wonder at himself for the present glaring exception. "You know, I come out of

the depths of the country, where friends are few and far between."

"At any rate, I don't think you'll let the Pappelheims 'take you under their wing,' as I hear they talk of doing. They'll get everything out of you and serve it up with sauce. It is my belief Herr Pappelheim sells scraps of open gossip to one of the local papers."

"Now," said Dahlmann, setting down his cup, "you must not forget you promised me your advice on a more important topic. I want you to be good enough to tell me what it is that does not please you in my acting."

"It is difficult to explain: it is not as if there were anything wrong; if there were you may be sure you would have heard of it from Dragenz."

He looked puzzled. "I have tried to keep in my mind every direction that Dragenz gave me, and carry it out to the best of my ability."

"Ah," she cried, "that is just what it is. Don't you see all those instructions are merely the scaffolding; the completed building must dispense with them."

He laughed a little. "But are you sure I am a completed building?" he said.

"You must be from to-morrow night. You must stand or fall as one. It won't do to be shored up."

"But to drop metaphor: what is it you want me to do differently?"

She looked at him as though she would have liked to say "How stupid you are!"

"But don't you see," she said, "that if I tell you it is just as much scaffolding as if Dragenz told you? I only want you to act straight out from yourself."

"Suppose I haven't it in me, what then?"

She had risen and was standing by the fire, and at his words she turned her bright eyes full on him, like two lamps she would read his soul by.

"Oh, yes, you have. It is there, the spirit and power of the music; only you hold it down, and won't let it come to the surface. If you would only let yourself go, and forget Dragenz and his maxims, you would be all right."

"This is quite different to all I have been taught up to now," he said with a perplexed look. "The burden of it all was—don't forget—be sure you cross the stage to the left center, and remember to raise the right arm here and bring forward the left foot there, and whatever you do, come up to the chalk marks."

"Chalk marks!" interjected Clare scornfully; "I should think they might let you dispense with chalk marks by this time."

"You forget what a beginner I am, Miss Arrowsmith. But is all this wrong? Because it is rather late, it strikes me, to begin on a new system."

"No, no; it is perfectly right as far as it goes, but you ought to have got beyond that now. You must do it, but you must not think of it."

"I am afraid I am rather dense," he said slowly.

"Let me try and show you my point of view." She came nearer and sat down, leaning toward him, her elbows on a low table, her chin on her hands. "Doesn't the music itself pour into you a personal conception of what the character you are singing must have been feeling? I know it does, or you couldn't sing as you do. Do you know you sang far better at Graf von Wenzel's than you did on the stage this morning?"

"Of course: I wasn't bothering about those confounded chalk marks. I begin to see."

"Well, the emotion of the music would naturally express itself in certain movements and gestures, according to your own personality, different in you, for instance, to what they would be with Lortzing or Pauli;

but if you throttle every instinctive motion with traditional rules, you will never carry your audience with you."

"Still," he said thoughtfully, "I don't see that we can dispense with rules. If I fail to come up to my chalk marks, someone else's are put wrong."

"Of course, of course; the rules are a necessary framework outside which we can none of us step without breaking the symmetry of the whole. I don't want you to come short of them, but to go beyond them. To give you an instance: when you throw the window open, you get there in five measured paces, and do it as if you were acting under orders; there is no suggestion of a man who pants for air. Forget how many steps you have been told to take, and I'll wager that, imbued with the music as you are, the rhythm of the action will take care of itself just as much as the rhythm of your singing does. When you were a child and learned music, you counted; you don't count now."

He nodded, and she went on:

"With Wagner's music-dramas the acting goes to the music as much as the singing does: there is no breaking off acting to sing nor singing to act: it all goes together. To me that is a help, and it will be to you when you emancipate yourself. You must forgive me for preaching to you like this: I get carried away."

He stood up. "Thank you very much. You have given me a lot of new ideas. I must go home and think it all over."

He was not the man to dawdle in the doorway with last words: his farewells were so quietly and quickly said that he was gone before Madame Malaxa quite realized he was going.

"My dear Clare," she cried, "how could you be so rash? You have completely shattered that poor man's

serene self-confidence, which was the one thing Graf von Wenzel relied on. If he should break down to-morrow night it will be entirely your doing."

Next night the great opera-house was packed from floor to ceiling. Curiosity was rife about the new tenor, and the whole town—Germans, Russians, English, and Americans—came flocking to witness the *début*. The royal box was blazing with diamonds, and the parterre was one mass of gorgeous uniforms. The unusual step that the Intendant was taking in letting the new man burst upon the public in a leading part, instead of gradually emerging through a course of messengers, heralds, and the like, excited an eager curiosity. The cautious prophesied disaster, but most people thought Von Wenzel knew what he was about.

"Well, Dahlmann, how do you feel about it? Not nervous at all?" said Max Lortzing, hurrying into the tenor's dressing room at the last moment. "If a crowd will keep you up, you have got it and no mistake. I don't know when I have seen such a good house. The King and Queen are there, and all the big wigs in force. Von Wenzel is in a devil of a fume."

"I am just ready: in good time, I hope."

"Excellent: the call-boy won't be here yet, and then for me, not for you. You will have another ten minutes to screw up your courage—not that you seem to want it; you are pretty cool. Well,"—glancing up at the towering figure, surmounted by the swan-crested helmet,—“you do credit to your get-up, I must say. When one recollects Pauli in that armor! Eh, Diehl?”

"Indeed, sir, you may say so," responded the dresser, who was kneeling on the floor with his mouth full of pins, adjusting the clasps of greaves and cuisses. The pins were not wanted, but it was his invariable custom to keep a little store of them in the corner of his mouth

ready for emergencies, and without them he would hardly have been recognized. "I really must say I never did see a gentleman pay for dress as Herr Dahlmann does; it is very gratifying."

He fell back upon his heels, looking up at his handiwork much as a sculptor might regard his completed statue.

"There, that 'll do," said Dahlmann impatiently, and, snatching up his sword, he buckled it on as he hastened down the passage, followed by the dresser with an anxious reminder that he had never once looked in the glass.

The curtain had not yet risen upon the opening scene when he got down, and he had a long while to wait for his call. He stood in the wings in readiness, reminding himself from time to time that it would be exactly the same as yesterday morning, and wondering with an unwonted irritation why everyone who approached him kept bothering him with advice and suggestions and questions how he felt. The moment came at last; he entered the swan boat, and felt it passing along with a gliding motion, carrying him out of the shelter into the full glare of the footlights.

He raised his head and looked straight out, and beyond the misty dazzle of light he encountered a sea of faces, all turned toward him, and a multitude of eyes all focused upon his. He had been wrong; it was different. For one instant he felt that he had no breath in his lungs, nor any power to draw one. The Kapellmeister's baton was going up, and with that upward stroke he must be ready. At that moment a sudden burst of applause broke out from among a group of English in the parterre, and was taken up in various parts of the house. The tableau was splendid as he stepped ashore; the majestic figure, towering by half a head above any other man on

the stage, roused an enthusiasm more than ready to find voice, with the kindly desire to encourage the newcomer. In vain the more critical portion of the audience, the natives especially, who intended to judge with their ears, not with their eyes, said h-sh. The noise would have drowned the first notes, and the baton stayed suspended. In the momentary pause he saw Elsa, standing forward alone, her eyes seeking his with an anxious, imploring look. It was the expression proper to her part, but it seemed to appeal to him: the iron grip on his chest relaxed; he drew a deep breath, and as the baton fell, the first words of the farewell to the swan floated out and filled the wide house to its furthest bounds.

"We shall do now," said Graf von Wenzel, at the close of the first act, wiping his forehead with a large white silk handkerchief. "I was terribly afraid he might be upset by that applause; I have known it have a most unfortunate effect on a beginner; but the appeal to his vanity seemed to wake him up. He certainly did far better than he has done yet."

"I congratulate you," said Lortzing, as he and Dahlmann hurried to their dressing rooms to exchange armor for wedding garments. "You did get a reception."

"Thanks. They received me very kindly, but I mustn't forget that my work is all to do yet."

"Not it. 'Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute,' as you will find. You have created a favorable impression, and that is more than half the battle. I don't know when I have heard a man so clapped out who was not an established favorite."

"That was my armor, not me," said Dahlmann dryly. "I don't know that it is particularly flattering to be applauded before one opens one's mouth, solely on the ground that one happens to stand a few inches higher than one's neighbors."

"Ah, well," said Max with a shrug and a sigh, "some day you will know what to be thankful for. I should like to know whether it is pride or humility that makes you take that tone."

The greenroom estimate of the value of Dahlmann's success was much what his own had been.

"He has a good presence and carries his armor well," remarked one, "and that is sure to go down with the public."

"Even with such a public as Blankenstadt, which takes itself very seriously as a musical judge," sneered Pauli.

"Oh, he has got a splendid voice," said Armbrecht, "and he is strong, as I have good reason to know. He bore down upon me as if he meant it. He'll certainly do me a mischief some day, and to-night he was so much core on in his acting. He is beginning to feel his feet, as we say."

"Oh, acting!" interrupted Pauli; "there was a great deal too much of that, I consider. He made his singing quite subservient to it. He hurried disgracefully in 'Vermagst du, Holde.' He seems to have gone in for the Arrowsmith's line of overdone and misplaced realism. On the operatic stage we require greater breadth." And he strutted across the room, humming a few bars of Lohengrin's part, just to give some idea of what the breadth of his own style would have been.

"Aha," laughed Pappelheim, "that is not so wonderful, for she has been coaching him herself. He drank coffee in the Finkenwiese yesterday."

"Coffee in the Finkenwiese!" cried Pauli shrilly; "I don't believe it. Why, you told me she would not have him at any price, and meant to do for him to-night."

"It does not look much like it," said Armbrecht dryly. "If he gets her on his side he will do."

"So long as his looks last. But the end of him will be he will grow fat. That build of man always drinks bock-bier and puts on flesh. He will go up like a rocket, and come down like the stick."

In front of the curtain the verdict was unanimous. It was an unqualified success, and Herr Intendant went from the royal box to the boxes of his friends, rubbing his hands and receiving felicitations on every side. As to the tenor himself, those who watched him wondered if he at all realized what was happening to him. In truth he hardly did: he seemed to himself to be singing in a dream: he was, as one might say, possessed. After the first moment, Brabant became the reality, and dreamland lay beyond the footlights. The applause beat upon his ear like the surge of the sea.

One moment of soul-satisfying triumph the evening held for him. As he and Miss Arrowsmith returned from their last appearance in front of the curtain, before she dropped his hand, she turned to him:

"I never enjoyed singing in Lohengrin so much," she said.

VII.

"WHY, Clare, what has happened to Herr Dahlmann?" cried Madame Malaxa, as she ran her eye down the operatic column of the *Tägliche Lauscher* some three weeks after the first appearance of the new tenor. "I thought he was going to be such a success. Slovenly—inartistic—excruciatingly flat! What does it mean?"

"Let me look." Clare came and read over her shoulder. "Pappelheim has inspired this," she said; "he is hand in glove with the sub-editor. It is just the worst thing that could happen."

"Then it is not true?" For Madame Malaxa had been kept in by a cold, and had missed the last few performances.

"To a certain extent it is, and that is the worst of it. On Thursday he made a bad stumble, and last night he was all abroad. His acting has completely gone to pieces, and—well, he was flat once. I did hope, though, he might pull round, for he made such a good impression at first that the public was slow to see anything amiss. I caught an ominous murmur at one moment, but he got his call."

"And now this will open their eyes."

"Of course it will, and everyone who fancies himself a critic will be eager to condemn."

"Poor fellow," said Madame Malaxa pityingly. "Stage-fright, no doubt. And now I suppose he will go the way of all the rest, and we shall have the whole business over again with somebody else."

"Not if I can prevent it," said Clare with energy.

"His height alone makes him worth a struggle, and his voice—why, it is one in a thousand when he doesn't let himself get all out of breath. Besides, I promised the Herr Graf I would help him."

"I don't see how you can," said her mother.

"Well, I did to a great extent the other night. But for my prompting he would have come utterly to grief, for he was totally deaf to the prompter. The thing is, how am I to get at him off the stage. You know I never hang about behind the scenes, talking to people. If he had had ordinary civility he would have called before now."

Madame Malaxa laid down the paper. "Well, I must take advantage of this sunshine to get out a little. I will change your books, and I must get some of those delicious coffee cakes at Fechter's. You had better rest. I understand now why you were so unusually tired last night."

Shopping in the Furker Strasse is a very beguiling occupation, and the short winter afternoon was beginning to close in before Madame Malaxa turned her steps homeward. She had just picked her way daintily across the wet cobblestones, her dress gathered up in one hand, displaying as neat and well-shod a foot and ankle as any lady of over sixty need wish to show, when she perceived a tall man sauntering slowly along the pavement she had just left, with a newspaper in his hand and an air of depression about his shoulders. Without more ado she retraced her steps in and out among the puddles, and then he had almost passed her by without seeing her.

"Why, Herr Dahlmann," she said, "what a long time it is since I have seen you! I have not been out this last week, and you seem to have quite forgotten your way to the Finkenwiese."

"I am extremely sorry for the cause, but I cannot

regret you were not at the opera last night." He spoke with a stiff politeness, but there was a dejection underneath that appealed to her pity. She tried not to see the paper in his hand, but it glared at her, and she felt her eyes were fixed on it.

"Oh, I don't care about 'Rienzi,'" she said hurriedly. "I am on my way home: won't you come in with me, and have a cup of tea—if you can do anything so English as drink tea in the afternoon?"

"You are most kind, but—I think I would rather not."

"What an unconventional way to decline an invitation," was her inward comment; "I suppose he is afraid to meet Clare." Aloud she said: "Oh, I am sorry you can't come, for I think my daughter wanted to see you about some opera matter. Perhaps another time——"

"Oh, in that case—may I carry your parcels?"

After all, he would rather go straight to her at once and inform her that he intended to relinquish his engagement at Christmas. He was not going to hang on waiting till the soprano's nod should cause his dismissal.

Clare was standing in the corner window, hastily sketching an effect of yellow, watery sunset beyond the trees, when Herr Dahlmann followed her mother into the room, and she heard the latter say:

"I shall leave you to my daughter to entertain for a few minutes while I take my bonnet off."

Clare held out her hand to him. "Excuse me if I go on painting just a minute. I want so much to catch that tone of delicate green in the rift, and it will be gone directly."

"Pray, don't let me interrupt. May I look?"

He stood a moment beside her, watching, as she dabbled on clouds with an apparent carelessness that masked a deft, unerring touch. For a little while he kept

silence; he was not sure he might speak while she painted; she seemed so absorbed in her task. Besides, he doubted how to introduce his announcement. He wished Madame Malaxa would come back. Miss Arrowsmith, too, was glad of the excuse of her painting for a respite. Now she had got him, she hardly knew what to do with him. His stateliness had dropped away, and he stood at her elbow like a schoolboy in disgrace.

Presently, as she washed out her brushes, her eye fell upon the paper he still held. "Herr Dahlmann," she said, "I see you have been browsing upon poison berries. You must not. Put it behind the fire, and forget it."

"Say rather wholesome medicine, mein Fräulein. Not but what I was quite as well aware as the writer of that article what a fiasco I made last night."

"Fiasco! Oh, you exaggerate! We all have to encounter a good bit of adverse criticism some time or other, and it does not do to take it to heart. You must remember how they praised you up at first, and take the rough with the smooth."

"You mistake me. I do not resent it. I know it was deserved, and the Kapellmeister let me know as much this morning."

"Oh, he has been scolding you, has he? And you have always been used to putting other people in the corner, and naturally don't relish being put there yourself."

He drew back a little. "It pleases you to jest," he said; "I cannot jest about it."

"Forgive me. I did not mean to hurt you. But, indeed, you take it too seriously. You were nervous and overdone last night: it happens to most of us at times. I think the liability to it is the penalty of the artist temperament."

"You are very kind in trying to excuse me, but really I don't believe I know what nerves are."

"You think you don't." She moved to the fire and seated herself in a low chair, motioning him to one near her. "You may as well confess, for though you carried it off with a high hand, and gave yourself rather a negligent and over-confident air, I saw what was the matter directly you came on."

He winced. "Well, I own it: part of the time I was in a hideous panic."

"I know. Ever since you made that false entry in 'Die Zauberflöte' you have thought about it night and day till it got on your nerves, and last night when you had to face the footlights the world beyond became a nightmare."

"You seem to understand all about it," he said; "but you don't get these panics?"

"Not now; but I have had my ups and downs. And then, you see, I am so strong. One of my masters used to say I was made of iron and India rubber."

"Strong!" He looked at her slight, spare figure, at her narrow, colorless face, and smiled. "Do you think I am less so?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't doubt that in mountaineering, wrestling, or throwing the hammer you could beat me, but you forget that these great parts make demands upon an unpracticed faculty in you; it is something more than physical and mental fatigue."

"But I am not easily tired; I have often sung for hours."

"I dare say, alone or at the practices; but a performance takes it out of one more than ten rehearsals. But what I meant was that most of us have grown up to this strenuous work through a long apprenticeship of small parts and under-studying. You plunge straight into it out of a very quiet life, in which the chief excitements, I imagine, were half-yearly exams and sudden descents of the Inspector."

"Well, yes, it is a change," he admitted.

"Of course it is. Those grand epic emotions are not realized without a certain cost to one's self. Soon you will toughen, and your nerve will come back."

He mused a moment, then said suddenly: "I did not think you would have been so kind to me."

"I ought to be, for I feel rather guilty. It was wrong of me to urge you to throw yourself more into it till you were used to the work. I made you burn the candle at both ends."

He thought she was right there. He had rather the feeling of an unpracticed swimmer who has ventured out to sea, tempted by a bolder and more experienced comrade, and losing confidence in himself, begins to sink.

"At any rate," he said, "you made that performance of Lohengrin a memorable one to me. I shall always look back to that as my one triumph."

"Oh, you and I shall have many such, I hope, in the days to come. And now, let us be practical. The first thing is this." She leaned forward, took the paper from his hand, and poked it well down among the blazing coals. "You must admit it was venomous and exaggerated."

"Perhaps; but it was the sense of meriting it that gave it the sting."

"Well, but the message of adverse criticism, even when it is deserved, is: Retrieve, retrieve."

His eyes glowed an instant, answering hers, then sank. "I shall have little chance of doing so. You know, this is only a trial contract; it ends in December."

Clare sat up straight. "Herr Dahlmann, I did not think you were a coward."

He flushed up. "I don't call it cowardice if, on testing one's fitness for a certain calling, and finding one's self unsuited to it, one withdraws."

"And you could relinquish such a career without a sigh?"

He drew a deep breath. "Is failure ever other than bitter?"

"Failure!" she cried. "You must not fail; you will not."

"It does not entirely lie with me. I had an interview with the Herr Intendant this morning, and he hinted that he means to terminate my engagement at Christmas if I do not."

Clare made a mental note that she would have a word to say to the Intendant on that head.

"Then you must set about retrieving at once," she said. "The second point is that you must never look back. If you were brought up on Hans Andersen, as all good German children should be, you will remember the cat's advice to Rudy: 'Never figure to yourself that you can fall, and you won't fall.'"

"Ah, but when one has been as near falling as I have——"

"Hush! You are not to dwell upon that. This morning I would not have let you speak of it at all, but since that article had flourished it before you, it was better to face it once for all, but now you must forget it. I had a lot more advice for you," she added, "but here come my mother, and the lamp, and the tea, so I will condense. Don't let the Intendant overwhelm you with new parts, and don't work so hard at rehearsal. You must assert your right to spare yourself."

As he rose to put a chair for Madame Malaxa, he tried to look the thanks he could not put into words. He had come, resolved that the soprano should wring no abject apology from him: he would simply state the fact that he was soon leaving, and then she could have no further concern with how he sang. He had thought to be snubbed, if not told he would be ousted from his post; he found himself consoled and restored to that comfortable

confidence in his own powers without which he had been exposed unarmed to the attacks of his enemies.

Over the teacups Madame Malaxa elicited the fact of his engagement, though not even her wiles could tempt him to be expansive upon the subject. Yes, his betrothed was very pretty, he admitted in reply to her questions; light-haired and blue-eyed; quite a country girl: in fact she had never been out of the Lindenthal in her life.

"What? She has never been to Blankenstadt to hear you sing! How she must be longing to come! The Lindenthal is no such great distance, after all. Couldn't she come some day, and I would chaperone her, and give her a bed here with the greatest pleasure."

"You are more than kind. I will tell her of your most friendly offer; but she is so shy, I am afraid she will not come."

Clare thought perhaps his reluctance to accept for her arose from his nervous dread of not singing his best.

"A little later on, perhaps, when we have some of our grand winter performances," she said. "Of course she is fond of music?"

"I suppose so," he answered doubtfully; "in a way she is, but she is no musician." It did not come easily to him to enlarge upon Hedwig's peculiarities; she seemed a little out of focus in his mental view just now.

"Of course you know," said Miss Arrowsmith, "that the Intendant talks of the Nibelung Cycle for the middle of December."

"He spoke of it to me some time ago, and I have been studying Siegfried; but now most likely——"

"Nonsense; there are no buts in the case. Of course you will sing Siegfried. I wonder if you have ever heard of an English poem on the subject that has just been sent me?"

"What, Morris' 'Sigurd the Volsung'? Have you got it?"

"Why, do you know it?"

"No, but I want so much to see it; I was just going to write for it."

"You know English?"

"A little; more to read than to speak. I am specially fond of English poetry."

"I will lend it you with pleasure. I was just going to say it bears so much upon the Wagner Cycle."

"I know. That is why I wanted to see it. I read somewhere that Wagner followed either Morris' version or the Icelandic Saga from which he drew it. Certainly the Cycle is not much like our Nibelungenlied."

"Oh," cried Clare impulsively, "wouldn't it be a splendid plan if we were to read it together! It would be an immense help to talk out our scenes in the light of it."

His eyes shone with pleasure. "Would you really? It would be as good as an English lesson to me. Are you sure it would not bore you?"

"I should like it of all things. Come in on Friday evenings. As there is no opera, we could both count on it, and I never go out in the season; I can't manage society and work at the same time. We'll begin next Friday."

When he was gone Madame Malaxa lingered a few minutes by the fire.

"I am glad you did not mind my bringing him in, Clare, though it is rather a breach of our usual custom as regards the singers. He looked so forlorn, poor fellow, when I came upon him."

"It was well you did. I believe we should have lost him if somebody had not come to the rescue."

"Do you think he will get over his stage-fright? I was curious to know what you meant to say to him; but

I stayed away because I thought he would take his scolding better if there were nobody by. I hope you were merciful."

Clare smiled. "I don't think I scolded him much: he seemed to want comforting more. He was dreadfully cast down, and actually talked of throwing it all up. He is not much used to adverse criticism, though I don't think he is exactly conceited. I like him better off his pedestal though. Anyhow, he is a great deal too valuable to lose. I think he will be all right in time."

"I am glad he is going to be married," said the Countess irrelevantly.

"Are you? Well, I suppose it is a good thing if it does not distract him from his work."

"I meant because this is such a gossipy place; and if you mean to see much of him, as you seem to intend, it is just as well."

"Oh," said Clare. "But you and I don't trouble our heads much about the remarks of my colleagues, do we? I wonder what the young woman is like."

"A regular little German Backfisch, I should think. His description did not sound very enthusiastic."

"No, but I dare say he was shy of talking much about her—a lucky thing, too. I was afraid when I heard you asking that you would pull the string of a regular shower bath of German schwärmerei."

After the next rehearsal Graf von Wenzel called upon Miss Arrowsmith.

"Do you know, I am getting a little uneasy about our new tenor," he said. "I am afraid the flattery of the first night has turned his head. He seems to think now that he has nothing to do but draw his salary, and it is of no consequence how he sings. Really 'Rienzi' was disgraceful. I have been expecting you to attack me ever since."

"Oh, I think one must have a little patience with a beginner, don't you?"

"H'm, well; but when we saw in 'Lohengrin' what he can do when he chooses; I spoke to him about it, and I must say I was much displeased. He gave himself great airs, and actually hinted at throwing us over at Christmas. I gave him to understand we were not so dependent upon him as he seemed to fancy."

Clare smiled. "I suppose he is touchy," she said; "but I gathered from what he said to me that he thought it was the other way, and he was threatened with dismissal."

"Touchy!" cried the Intendant. "You may say so, but I call it so ungrateful, after all I have done for him. Then Kritzler tells me that to-day at the practice he hardly troubled to open his mouth."

"Oh, that was my fault," said Clare; "I strongly advised him not to exert himself so much when there was no occasion. Do you know, I think you and Herr Kritzler have been making a great mistake in putting so much on him all at once. You seem to forget that he is new to it all."

"Oh, a great strong fellow like that! Hard work won't hurt him, and he is much too vain to be nervous. If that were going to be the trouble it would have shown itself the first night."

"I am not so sure of that, and you must confess that Lohengrin and Tannhäuser in one week was a heavy demand."

"But, my dear young lady, that means Elsa and Elizabeth in one week, and you showed not the slightest sign of fatigue."

"I—oh, I am as tough as leather. Besides, think how long I have been used to it: don't you see that makes all the difference?"

The Intendant shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes twinkled a little. "Well, I am sure I am only too glad if you will stand by him and take his part."

"I shall not take his part if he does not improve, but he will. I only want him to have fair play."

"And do you think it would be fair play to put him on to small parts for a time? I don't want to spoil his prestige—not for his sake, *bien entendu*, but for our own."

"No, I don't think that would do; he would eclipse the rest too much; he must be leading man or nowhere."

"Then what would you do?"

"Oh, if you ask me, I would change the programme for next week entirely; I would put on things that Lortzing can do, and let Herr Dahlmann have a good rest. Then Lohengrin again, and he will come up ready for Siegfried, you will see."

"I shall hold you responsible, mind."

As he went downstairs the Intendant remarked to himself: "After all, Dahlmann's looks have done more for us than even I expected. But Miss Arrowsmith of all people——"

VIII.

"I was under the impression," remarked Miss Arrow-smith one day, "that I was going to teach Herr Dahlmann English; but it is being gradually borne in upon me that it is the other way on, and he is teaching me."

"He seems to get on fast," said her mother, "even with the pronunciation. I seldom hear you correcting him now."

"Yes, his ear is wonderfully delicate: I suppose that comes from being a musician. Still, I may maintain my ascendancy there; but mentally, I assure you, I find myself sitting at his feet. I suppose it is the force of old habit on his part, and the odd thing is, I take it with the utmost docility. I know Germans always think they understand our language better than we do ourselves, and I began to see why."

"He is certainly a remarkable man," said the Countess. "If he is to be taken as an average specimen of the village schoolmaster in these parts, it is no wonder the Germans should be such a highly educated race."

Probably he was hardly a fair sample, though a schoolmaster is perhaps one of those things best "made in Germany." Less red tape goes to the production, and more general culture of the mind. Perhaps from their training being less specialized, it is not quite such a manufactory of prigs as with us. In Dahlmann any narrowing tendency was counteracted by a mind of unusual depth and originality, by the artist temperament which made him a musician by nature and a schoolmaster by accident, by a habit of omnivorous reading, and, not

least, by an intimate friendship with a man who, if he had not been maimed at the outset by a disastrous fate, would probably have made his mark in the world.

It had not often happened to Clare Arrowsmith to come in contact in the flesh with an intelligence keener than her own; the minds she looked up to were those she encountered in books. She had felt very kindly disposed toward the new tenor, anxious to help him and give him the benefit of her greater experience; but however it might be in a sphere which he had only just entered, and in which he was quite at home, in things of the mind she realized in a very short time that she had met her master. Her idea of the English readings had been that he would painfully construe, and she would enlighten with explanations; but, behold, it was he who lighted up obscure corners with the lamp of an erudition that simply amazed her. He seemed to have read all that had ever been written on the subject of the old German Legends and Icelandic Sagas, from which both her countrymen and his had drawn so much of their inspiration. One day she expressed her astonishment.

"Herr Dahlmann," she said, "they told me you had been master of the Lindendorf school before you came here; it must have been a mistake; you must certainly have been a university professor."

He laughed a little. "I am afraid I was not even considered a very good schoolmaster; these unpractical studies were rather a snare. I used to get pulled up for teaching too much history and poetry and not enough arithmetic. But, you know, our schools are not quite so rigid in their curriculum as yours in England. Nature gives children an insatiable appetite for stories and a faculty of learning by rote; we feed them with tales while they are small, history or legend, and later they get by heart the poems which tell their favorite stories.

It may not make so much show in an examination paper, but it gives them a love for the literature of their own country."

"I have often wondered," said she, "at the familiarity your countrymen of the lower classes often show with romance and mediævalism. Still, I don't suppose you had to dig so deep for fairy tales for your children."

"Why, no, I did not teach this sort of thing in Lindendorf"—tapping a learned disquisition into which they had just been diving; "but I had a great friend there, the village parson, and these legends were rather a hobby of his and mine. We once planned a small monograph on the variants of the 'Nibelungenlied' and their sources, but we found the ground was preoccupied, so we dropped it; but that is how it comes about that I have read up a good deal about it."

A woman's mind, such as Miss Arrowsmith's, was no less of a revelation to him than his to her. That a woman should have either the desire or the capacity to enter into the pursuits that interested him was in itself quite a new discovery. If his masculine grasp made him as a rule the leader, her swiftness of perception and poetic insight not seldom flew ahead in a way that charmed no less than it surprised him. The readings grew to be a keen delight to both, and he soon was quite as much at home in the corner window overlooking the Finkenwiese as he used to be in the parsonage study.

He made no other friends. He was unpopular with most of his colleagues; his advantages, quite as much as his disadvantages, went against him with them. It was not only that his coming had drawn out a good deal of professional jealousy in men who saw an outsider put over their heads, but their world was not his world, and he was too old to be easily adaptable. His intellectual gifts were distinctly a drawback with the half-educated

men who formed the bulk of the company, and there was about him a touch of severity in taste and conduct, fostered by the seclusion of his early life, that repelled his easy-going *confrères*. Even Max Lortzing, who had at first evinced such a disposition to be friendly, drew off, and looked somewhat askance at him.

The shadow which had threatened his prestige in the first few weeks had quite dispersed. A brilliant performance of the Nibelung Cycle had more than redeemed the promise of his *début*. His name began to be mentioned outside Blankenstadt, and the tone of the newspapers—even the stinging *Lauscher*—became quite flattering. The Intendant smiled and congratulated the soprano on the success of her treatment. She disclaimed any credit in the matter; but, in truth, no little was due to her, and he knew it, and was grateful. She had roused his failing courage at the most critical moment, had given him just the aid he needed, and still stimulated him to aim at higher and higher achievement.

Madame Malaxa had grown quite fond of him. The great sorrow of her life had been that none of her sons had lived to grow up, and she found an unoccupied, motherly corner in her heart for the solitary man. It was not very prudent, perhaps, but then prudence was not one of her leading characteristics. He was quite a new variety to her, with his country-bred simplicity, his rare uprightness, his powerful grasp of mind with its curious limitations. She liked to study him, and would often try to draw him out about his former life. He was too entirely free from self-consciousness to mind talking about himself when he saw that it really interested his listener, and would relate quaint experiences among his little scholars, their naughtiness, their denseness, the extraordinary answers they sometimes gave, or little traits of affectionateness that had touched him the

more that he was not by nature a child-lover. Sometimes it was of his early life his auditors wanted to hear, of his own grave and lonesome childhood in the little wooden parsonage, shut away among the hills. They seemed a grim quartette who had surrounded his cradle; the old pastor, stern and silent, spending his days in his study in the midst of the beloved books he could no longer see to read; the mother whose love had disguised itself as severity; the two shrewish half-sisters whose presence made a jarring note in the domestic peace. They seemed like characters in a story to Madame Malaxa and Clare, and the former used to say hearing him was like reading some of Bjørnsen's novels. It had been a hard and narrow life, but it had neither hardened nor narrowed him.

One day, after they had grown more intimate, Clare made acquaintance with another figure from his portrait gallery. They had just finished reading together, when his eye was caught by a large photograph of Giorgione's concert party, which stood upon an easel just under the hanging lamp. He sprang up and went to examine it, exclaiming, half to himself, "What a likeness!"

"It is the Giorgione in the Pitti Palace," said Miss Arrowsmith. "Who does it remind you of? Not anyone here?"

"No; oh, no! it is like my friend." As though there were but one in the world to whom that title belonged.

"You mean the one with his hands on the harpsichord? It is a remarkable countenance; I have often thought it looked as if it had a story in it."

"His face has a story in it, and a terrible one," said Dahlmann.

"Tell it me. You have so often spoken of him, I should like to hear."

After a minute he came back and sat down beside her.

"It was in all the papers at the time," he said; "but it must be nearly ten years ago, and you would not have been in Germany then. Can you believe that such a man as that once had to stand his trial for the murder of his own brother?"

"How awful! How was it?"

"The worst of it was they had never been good friends from boyhood. Anton, the elder, my friend, was vehement, not easily placable; the other headstrong and vain. Their father was dead, and their mother spoilt her youngest boy, and rather fostered the ill-feeling between them. When they grew up the worst happened: they both fell in love with the same girl."

"And she, I suppose, played them off one against the other?"

"No; unlike most women, she could discriminate the true from the false; she chose Anton. She was very beautiful, and I think she must have been very good. They were wonderfully happy. They went to live in a seaport town in the North, where he had got a church. Heinrich had rushed off to South Africa in the first sting of his disappointment. Would to Heaven he had stayed there! But about a year later he came back, and there ensued a disagreement about money matters. Neither of the two cared for money much, but it was a pretext for a quarrel, and an acrimonious correspondence followed. Then Heinrich insisted upon a personal interview: it took place, and they parted on very bad terms. Anton says it was his fault; I don't know.

"His house was just outside the town, and near it was a high bastion or sea-wall on which his wife used to walk up and down. He had been anxious to spare her all knowledge of the quarrel, and great was his annoyance, when he came out from his work in the town, to see his brother, whom he imagined on his way home, talking to

her, while she looked both angry and frightened. She called to her husband, and, as he ran forward, Heinrich, who had not seen his approach, startled, took a hasty step back, forgetful of the narrow place on which he stood, caught his foot in a coping, and, before his brother reached him, fell backward, dashing out his brains on the rock below.

"The consequences were hideous; not only was he taken almost immediately into custody, charged with the murder, but the poor wife, who was in no condition to bear such a shock, bore a dead child and died that same night. Everything seemed to point to violence on his part; not least his own frantic self-accusations, and he would certainly have been convicted, if only of manslaughter, but for the testimony of a fisherman who came forward unexpectedly and stated that he and his mate had witnessed the whole occurrence from their boat, and could swear that the deceased fell while the accused was yet some yards from him. He was acquitted; but his career could hardly have been more absolutely ruined by a conviction. He felt himself morally guilty of the quarrel, and for many months his mind was quite astray. The last bitter drop was not spared him: his mother would never be convinced of his innocence, and refused ever to see him again. Some time after, when his mind had recovered its balance, the General Superintendent, who had been most kind throughout, arranged to have him transferred to a country pastorate in Blachsen, so far from the scene of the tragedy that it might be hoped nothing would ever transpire among his new parishioners. I had just been appointed to the school, and we became friends. That is all the story. I wonder what made me tell it you?"

"It is the very saddest story I ever heard," said Clare. Her eyes shone with a moisture that softened their usual

brilliancy. "Those are the things," she added after a pause, "that make one almost doubt the benevolence of a Power that could let them happen."

"Ah," he said, "if happiness were the end of life!"

She made no answer, and he went on: "I suppose the very extremity of such suffering makes no middle course possible between utter faith and utter shipwreck. But I think you will generally find it is the prosperous people, not the sufferers, who doubt."

IX.

A KAFFEE-KLATSCH was in full swing at Frau Pappelheim's; that most German of institutions, where the masculine element, which certainly gives backbone to most social functions, is rigidly excluded, and the women have it all their own way. Many of the guests had brought their knitting, and needles clicked while tongues clacked. But Fräulein Brenner, who was rather more advanced in her views, came armed with her cigarette case, though her cigarettes were more often between her fingers than her lips.

I wonder whether anywhere out of Blankenstadt the opera singers form themselves into a circle so homely, so fussy, so gossipy,—in a word, so kleinstädtisch,—as they do in that music-loving city. The center of this circle, oddly enough, was to be found in the house of "Frau Plappenmaul"—as she was nicknamed behind her back. I say oddly, because it is not often that a chorus singer, as that lady was, is permitted to associate on equal terms with the leading ladies of the company; but in this case she was connected with the higher walks through her husband, who was a tenor soloist of the second rank, and moreover had learned the secret of making herself indispensable by playing jackal to the lioness of Frau Rauch and Sophie Brenner.

It was not to be supposed that the new tenor's frequent visits to the Finkenwiese should pass without comment. He and his hostesses might alike be people who held their tongues about their own doings, yet somehow or other the Pappelheim clique contrived to be

fully informed of all that went on. They felt it was but fair that Dahlmann, who had cheated them of the excitement of a breakdown for which they had been all agog, after his shaky Rienzi, should supply them with some other topic of conversation. It would hardly seem that much was to be got out of the bald fact of his studying Morris' poem with a lady in whose language it was written, but after a few dexterous turns, given by various tongues, it began to assume quite a scandalous complexion.

"It is rather comical, isn't it," remarked Frau Pappelheim, "to see the way in which the Frau Gräfin Malaxa and Miss Arrowsmith, for whom we were none of us good enough, have opened their arms to this village schoolmaster from no one knows where? And, upon my word, I don't know which is the most in love with him, the mother or the daughter."

"I always thought," said Frau Rauch, dropping lumps of sugar into her coffee with an air of relish, "that Miss Arrowsmith set up for being better than her neighbors—quite a prude, in fact."

"Oh, but, beste Frau," cried Lottie Schmidt, who had a loyal admiration for Clare, "why should you think there was anything extraordinary in their having him there sometimes. It is pure good nature. I believe the Herr Intendant asked Miss Arrowsmith to take him by the hand because he was such an ignoramus."

"Oh, we all know how good-natured she was to the other tenors," sneered Sophie Brenner. "I should say it was quite her leading characteristic."

"Of course I admit she is proud——" began Lotta.

"Pride," said Frau Rauch, half shutting her eyes, "is a very useful quality to cultivate for people who are too plain to have much temptation to be anything else."

If spite can ever be excusable, it would be in the

present case. The poor woman was fighting a losing battle with time, and getting worsted day by day. It must needs be a bitter thing for one who has for years filled the proud position of first soprano to retire gradually into the background, to have her scepter wrested from her failing grasp and given to another while she looks on: to treat that other with generosity requires something little short of heroism. But heroism was not within Frau Rauch's scope; she had lived all her life for vanity, and now she tried to fight her fate with vain weapons. Rouge and pearl powder, eyebrow pencils wielded with a dexterity which was a fine art in itself, wigs of golden hair and artistically managed padding might go far to deceive the eye, but what should give her back those high notes on which the very structure of her fame was built? She still continued to excuse herself to herself: she had a slight cold; she was overtired; in a week or two she would sing as well as ever. But she knew in her soul that never again should she bring down the house with her wonderful shake on C in alt as in time past; in a word, her day was over.

One by one she saw her great parts taken from her and given to the English soprano, and even the consolation she expected to derive from the admittedly inferior looks of her rival was denied her. The magic of Miss Arrowsmith's acting, no less than the great beauty of her voice, seemed to blind that fickle public altogether to her want of physical charm. For a time Frau Rauch hoped her eclipse would be only temporary. The Arrowsmith would surely prove unpopular, and she herself would recover her old prestige. The Intendant rather fostered this delusion: her experience was useful, and he wished to keep her on for queen-mothers and such parts as do not require much singing.

"My good creature," he had said upon one occasion,

"be reasonable. It is imposible you should take Isolde again until your high notes come back, and in the meantime we must do the best we can."

There had been tender passages between them once in the vanished years, and she had to hear herself called a good creature by a man who had once sighed for her favor! He need not have been astonished that at his address she went into hysterics, but he was.

She knew well enough that no sneers nor slighting speeches would diminish Clare's prestige by one iota, nor stifle one round of applause; yet it seemed a consolation to make them, and that her rival should lay herself open to any unkind remarks was a positive pleasure.

"Proud and plain, you call her," remarked another soprano, who had in her time suffered from Frau Rauch's snubs; "well, if that is plainness, I am not sure I would not rather have it than a great many people's beauty: it seems to draw."

"Yes," chimed in Lotta, "Clare is so effective. If you can make all the men rave about you, and twist the Herr Intendant round your little finger, I don't know what more you need ask."

Miss Arrowsmith's influence with the Intendant was rather a sore point with Sophie Brenner, as well as with Frau Rauch, and she put in her oar. "Yes, indeed, I call it scandalous the way he gives in to her. To give you an instance: is it not an admitted rule that a soprano should always make up fair and a contralto dark? And just because she chooses to wear her own hair, and happens to have a lot of it, I am condemned to a fair wig, which is most trying to my style; for, of course, two brunettes would be a manifest absurdity."

"I call it most unjust," said Frau Rauch. "I should certainly speak to Dragenz if I were you."

"I spoke to the Intendant himself, and what do you think he said? That Miss Arrowsmith had most beautiful hair, and it would be a pity not to make the most of natural advantages! And why am I not to make the most of my natural advantages, I should like to know?"

"What a shame!" cried Frau Pappelheim sympathetically. "And yours are far better worth making the most of than hers, as everyone must admit."

For she liked to atone for sharp things said of the absent by rather fulsome sweets to present company.

"Isn't it funny," said Lotta, "the change that Max Lortzing's sentiments have undergone? At first he made such an ostentatious show of friendliness to the new tenor; he was far above all manner of professional jealousy, and now he evidently hates him like poison."

"Ah, I suppose the rival Lohengrins come in each other's way at the Finkenwiese. Max is the idlest and least ambitious of men; he would let the other rob him of all his laurels without a murmur, but when it comes to the favor of Miss Arrowsmith, then look out for storms."

"Pooh!" Lotta made a little scornful gesture with her hand. "Max, indeed! He might know he hasn't a chance with her."

"Nor the schoolmaster either; she is for their betters. Don't you see she has her eye upon the Intendant, no less?"

There was an exclamation of incrudulity at that.

"Well," said Frau Rauch, "she may spare herself the trouble; he may flirt; he is an incorrigible sinner, we all know, but he is too wary an old fox to be caught."

A general laugh was the response; for Frau Rauch's own wiles had been of the most transparent nature.

She looked round sharply. "Well, as to the schoolmaster," she pursued, "somebody told me when he first

came that he was betrothed to a young lady in his own part of the world."

"Oh, so he is," answered Frau Pappelheim; "Von Wenzel has seen her. A very pretty little damsel, was his description of her. I think she is much to be pitied."

"Yes, indeed. I think it is most unprincipled of Miss Arrowsmith." And Fräulein Brenner selected another cigarette from her case with quite a virtuous air.

"Oh, my dear soul," cried Frau Pappelheim, "you don't suppose she is in earnest! She doesn't want to marry him. It is all in the way of practice. You see, the love-making goes so much more naturally if you are used to doing a little of it at home—under the eyes, of course, of the Frau Mama."

Meanwhile the subjects of these amiable remarks were placidly pursuing their way quite unconscious of, or indifferent to, any comments their proceedings might excite. Dahlmann was rapidly slipping into the position of household friend—a position much less well understood in German society, where men and women mingle so much less freely than with us. It is in any case one that lends itself easily to remark and speculations, but to the speculations of outsiders Madame Malaxa was singularly indifferent. She was used to men's society and liked it, and she had taken a great fancy to the gentlemanly tenor. The easy comradeship in work and study growing up between him and her daughter gave her no concern; in fact, it seemed to her that the friendship of a man she liked and trusted as she did Dahlmann was a safeguard rather than a danger.

X.

DECEMBER came, muffling Blankenstadt in its great white mantle, and laying a mute grip upon the innumerable fountains. Yet the full tide of busy life through the whilom noisy streets was not checked, only changed; instead of the crunch of wheels and beat of hoofs there was the swift glancing of sleighs, the merry tinkle of sleigh-bells and ringing of voices through the clear frosty air. For drear December is Blankenstadt's most festive season. When other gay cities hibernate, Blankenstadt turns out in force upon the ice, and skates all day and dances all night—or goes to the opera.

But while half the world plays, the other half must work to afford them amusement, and Clare Arrowsmith belonged to the working half. While she had to perform the leading *rôle* in some great opera three times a week, she found it would not do to fritter her strength away upon the balls, at-homes, and Kaffee-Klatsches that diversified the leisure of the butterflies. The solemn court balls which twice in the season were afforded to the blest dwellers within the charmed circle of "Hoffähigkeit" she was indeed obliged to attend; but that she regarded as part of her business. Not only did she find that even her elastic strength demanded rest on alternate evenings, but she could not afford the time to keep up the ceremonial of calls and counter civilities which any entering into the German or Anglo-American society would have entailed.

So she kept out of the whirl, except that on her off days, when no singing was required of her, she could not

resist the seduction of the ice. That fairy gift of hers whereby she did everything with a certain superlative ease would have made her a skater even without the advantage of several winters in Germany, and on the great lake, where some of the finest skating is to be seen, people would pause to watch her twining in and out, sometimes with short swallow flights, sometimes with a long sweep like a sea-gull, and inhabitants would point her out to newcomers with pride.

She seldom joined any other skaters. Hockey on the ice, or the quadrilles and lancers in which her compatriots delighted, did not appeal to her; she generally went alone, so when one afternoon she laid her hands in those of the new tenor, and sped with him round the whole circuit of the lake, every head was turned to look at them, and remarks passed from lip to lip. Critically as they were watched, the verdict was that his skating was worthy of hers, and when, having reached the farther end, they loosed one hand and came back in the combined figure called the Flying Mercury, a little group standing at the head of the lake broke out into applause, as though it had been a scene in the opera arranged for their benefit.

Active as Countess Malaxa was for her years, she was too fragile to stand about on the snowy banks while her charge disported herself. If she chaperoned her daughter at the theater, she thought she did her duty, and after driving her down to the ice, usually returned to the fire-side, sending the sleigh back for her before dusk. One afternoon she had not been settled half an hour, with her little bronze slippers on the fender and Bourget's "Pastels" in her hand, when the door opened and Clare made her unexpected reappearance.

"My dearest child, has anything happened? What has brought you back so early? Did you walk?"

"Yes, I walked," said Clare, replying to the last question and ignoring the others.

"But if you were tired why didn't you come back in the sleigh with me? You have not had a fall?"

"A fall! no. Unless from the height of my own conceit." She laughed a little, and, sitting down on the fender stool, began to loosen her fur boa.

Her mother looked at her. "Well, Clare, out with it."

"I suppose I may as well confess. I had to give poor Max his quietus. I staved it off as long as I could, and at last it seemed to me it would be better to let him have it out and get it over: he wouldn't take a hint."

"I would have staved it off still if I had been you. I thought you never skated with anyone."

"Not usually; but, you see, I had just given Herr Dahlmann a turn, so when Max came up and demanded one, I hardly saw my way to refusing. Then, of course, he availed himself of the opportunity, and I had to make him understand it was no good."

"Well? Did he bear it pretty well?"

"He did not bear it at all; he behaved as badly as possible. He called me all the names he could think of, and hurled Heine at me till I was half stunned."

"Called you names! My dear Clare, he must have been drinking."

"Oh, no; he was quite sober, but not quite sane. He was terribly upset, poor fellow, and he is very excitable. The worst of it was he had got it into his head he would have had a different answer a few months ago. I am sure I never gave him any cause to think so."

"No, really, I don't think you did," said her mother. "You were perhaps a little less gruff to him than you are to most of the others; but I am sure you never gave him any reason to build his hopes upon you."

"That was what annoyed me so," pursued Clare. "Of

course, I did not expect him to like it; men are always so astonished when they are refused; but if I had thought he would have turned upon me and abused me, I certainly would not have given him the chance. Heartless coquette was about the drift of his accusations, and, honestly, I think I may say no one is less open to the charge than I am."

"Certainly that has never been your line. Still, do you know there is one direction in which I would have you be a little upon your guard."

Clare turned upon her.

"You too, mother! Well, if you are going over to Mrs. Grundy, I give you up."

"It is not Mrs. Grundy at all," said the Countess with spirit; "but we are not living in the Garden of Eden, and lately it has crossed my mind whether we are quite wise in making such an exception of Herr Dahlmann."

"Why should you bring his name in?" asked Clare sharply.

"Because I imagine Max did; by implication if not explicitly."

Clare flushed. "That was just what made me so angry," she said. "Ever since I have been in the profession I have made it my object to keep entirely clear of the flirtations and squabbles and scandals that the life seems to make almost inevitable if you mix much with the rest, and I thought I had succeeded. I have rather prided myself on my reputation for stand-offishness; and then the very first time I am thrown, in the way of my work, with a man of such simplicity and straightforwardness that I feel I can make a friend of him, I am accused of a common vulgar flirtation. I could make allowance for Max's excitement, but that you should take that view is too bad."

"My dear, I don't accuse you of flirting," said

Madame Malaxa, "but we must take the world as we find it."

"If you mean by that that we must go out of our way to avoid its silly comments, I don't agree with you. Do you mean to throw Herr Dahlmann over? I thought you were fond of him."

"I am fond of him, and I should not think of giving him up. You know I never have been fussy on the subject of gossip. I made up my mind long ago that in your position you were sure to be talked about, and the only wise thing was to go our own way and do whatever we think right. But, comments apart, I confess I have had misgivings lately about Herr Dahlmann. We have let him slide into a kind of intimacy that may have its dangers."

Clare's chin went up. "Well, mother," she said, "I have been called an icicle, and a stone, and a great many hard names of that sort, but it is a new idea to me that you should suppose because I have been interested in helping Herr Dahlmann with his work and his English that I am going to fall in love with him."

"I am not thinking of you, my dear, but of him."

"Him! Why, you don't seem to remember that he is engaged."

"I do remember it; but does he?"

"Mother, I really think you are very unjust to him. I am quite sure he is far too conscientious and dutiful ever to let his affections stray in any unauthorized directions." She laughed a little.

"I am sure he is very high principled; but there is a good deal of human nature in the best of men, Clare."

Clare rose to her feet, and swung her boa impatiently in her hand. "It is an odious world," she said, "if one can never make friends with anyone without this sort of

thing cropping up. I thought we had resolved to be above it."

She broke off abruptly, for at that moment there came a tap on the door, followed by the subject of their discussion; for Dahlmann had grown sufficiently intimate to come up unannounced. Mother and daughter exchanged a half-amused, half-guilty glance, and welcomed him with a little more cordiality than usual to cover the slight embarrassment.

"I came," he said, looking at Clare, "to see if anything had happened to you. You left the ice so early, I was afraid something was wrong."

"No; oh, no; thanks very much. I was tired and bored, and the wind was cold."

He did not think the wind had been cold nor his companion bored when they had come flying down the lake together in the double Mercury. He looked from one to the other, and fancied he detected an air of having been interrupted.

"I must go," he said, declining the proffered chair. "I only looked in for an instant just to satisfy myself that all was well. I have to make up for all the time I wasted on the ice this morning."

"Oh, can't you stay?" said Clare, "and we will have our reading to-night. I did so want to finish 'Brynhild,' and you won't be here next Friday."

He hesitated. "I have the 'Preislied' on my mind," he said. "Kritzler was not quite satisfied at the practice, and I wanted to work it up a bit."

"But you can practice here just as well, and have the benefit of my criticisms to boot," cried Clare; and her mother added "Do stay!" with all the more warmth that she was conscious of her expressed intention to put an end to these constant evening visits. Just one more could do no harm, and she did not want to snub him sud-

denly. He never needed much pressing; the atmosphere of the Finkenwiese was far more homelike to him than that of the crowded pension where he had his quarters, and he sank into his accustomed chair with a delicious sense of being welcome and at ease, and no suspicion of the sentence of banishment hanging over him.

Tea came in, and the momentary constraint vanished. While Clare poured it out, her mother said, "How you must be looking forward to spending Christmas at home after all your hard work!"

He smiled a little. "I don't know that I am particularly. I am afraid one outgrows the enthusiastic joy in holidays one used to feel as a boy. Since it was offered to me, I felt it would be foolish to refuse. 'He that will not when he may,' you know; but I would really rather have waited till the spring. I am just beginning to settle into my work."

Clare refused to see the glance her mother shot at her across the tea table.

"Ah," she said, "you feel now how it grips you. I could see you did last week. By the way, I suppose you have seen what the *Lauscher* said of your Siegfried?"

"No, I have been so obedient, I have not looked at the papers since you forbade me."

"You may now though. They have made you handsome amends. It is me they are down upon this time, though not for anything I could help. I am too thin and wiry to fulfill the writer's ideal of the magnificent Brünnhilde."

Thin? Wiry? Those did not seem quite the right expressions to describe the subtle, sinuous lines of her figure, the flexible grace and strength of every movement. He said nothing, but his eye followed her as she bent over the fire to rearrange the logs with a look that was not lost upon the Countess. A little while after the

two ladies left him in possession of the piano while they went away to change their dresses.

It was not the first time he had practiced there, and that especial spot, sacred to Clare and to Art, always had an effect upon him very unlike that of the bare, cold room in which his work was usually accomplished: his voice seemed to take on a mellow richness, as if the warmth had thawed it, or the scent of the Naples violets on the bracket behind him had somehow got into it. The grand piano hemmed in a little alcove, within which Clare had collected her pet photographs and such little fetiches as women love to surround themselves with, and it was further fenced off from the world of the room beyond by an immense palm. In this corner had been put the photograph of the Giorgione which so remained Dahlmann of his friend, and the violets were just underneath it.

Presently Clare came back and stood by the fire, listening. She had put on an old theater gown of deep-red brocade, which fell in long lines from her shoulders to the floor; the square opening was filled with soft old lace, with a broad gold collar clasping her throat. She looked unusually well in it; the keen air on the ice, or the excitement of her little encounter with Max, had given her a color which heightened the luster of her eyes and made her almost handsome. In her hand she held a screen of peacock's feathers which she had taken off the mantelpiece to shade her face from the blaze of the wood fire.

He went on singing to the end, and when the last notes of the "Preislied" ceased, she looked up at him:

"You won't better that," she said; "you are in good voice to-night. But I wonder why it is I never like you so well in Walther as in some of your other parts. The character does not seem to suit you. I wish you would sing me one of your special favorites."

His hands wandered about the notes, as he felt his way from one key to another while he considered; then the whole room seemed filled with the divine melody of "Adelaide." He sang without notes, and his eyes were fixed upon his one listener. The hand holding the fan dropped and hung straight down before her; she did not change her listening attitude, but she stirred a little, and in the dancing firelight her color glowed deeper. As the last passionate, thrilling appeal rang out, the Countess came and stood in the door of the boudoir. She waited till he had finished before she came forward.

"That was beautiful," she said. "You have certainly got on in these two months."

He rose from the piano. "Thank you, Madame; I am glad you think so." But he felt for a moment as if he had suddenly fallen from Paradise.

A little later he and Miss Arrowsmith were bending over their books, while Madame Malaxa, seated at another table, was intent on a minute pack of cards which she was dealing out in various complicated arrangements. Patience was one of her favorite amusements, and she used to boast that she knew no less than one hundred and twenty-three intricate varieties.

Presently Clare closed the volume and pushed it away. "There," she said, "that will be a good place to stop. We will not begin 'Gudrun' till you come back."

A little silence fell upon them. Dahlmann did not seem to have anything to draw forth from his usual store of illustration, comparison, or reference. It began to grow irksome; she wished he would say something or else go. She felt a necessity for making conversation which she rarely felt with him, and began to talk rather at random of the crowd upon the lake. "Did you ever see it so gay as it was this afternoon?" she said. "By the way, did you notice Miss Laycock, that American

millionairess from Chicago? She was in the most amazing get-up. I saw she had annexed an English title: that young Lord Harborough who was skating with her all day is the eldest son of the Earl of Combermere. I suppose she has an ambition to be a Countess."

"Why, I thought you told me she was engaged to that fellow in the American Legation who used to bring her to the opera nearly every night."

Clare shrugged her shoulders. "So she was in the summer," she said.

He looked up quickly. "You seem to regard a betrothal very lightly."

"Say rather, Miss Laycock does. I should think she had had half a dozen of men 'on approval' since she has been in Blankenstadt."

In his grave face was no response to her half-laughing tone. He rose and stood by the chimney-piece, and, taking a little Dresden shepherdess in his hand, appeared to be examining it minutely. "I should like to know," he said slowly, "what your real judgment would be in such a case; not the mere surface comment, but what you think the right and wrong of the question."

"Oh, one cannot take Miss Laycock seriously; she is a butterfly, and must act as the butterflies do."

He looked baffled, but, still examining the little figure, he persisted: "Put the case of an engagement entered into in all good faith, but unadvisedly, and suppose that circumstances—the whole outlook—have completely altered, is the man irrevocably bound?"

Clare's face changed, and a look of hardness came into it. "You have reversed the position," she said; "you speak of the man."

"You mean there is one law for a man and another for a woman?"

"Yes," she said, "I do. At any rate, for a woman in

the position of the one we are discussing, the prey of fortune-hunters: I think she is certainly excusable if she puts several men to the test before taking the irrevocable plunge. But for a man, who is free to choose, who can ask a girl or not ask her as he thinks proper, what excuse is there? If he gets on in the world, and leaves her as it were behind him, is he free to take or leave as he chooses? Was the world made for men alone? What of the girl's happiness?"

"You are right," he said. "As you know, betrothal with us is more seriously regarded than in other countries, and is not to be set lightly aside. I was interested in hearing what your English view would be."

Clare drew up her long throat and looked at him. "I should despise a man who could think of being false to his word," she said.

He set the ornament he had been fingering carefully down in its place, and held out his hand to say good-night. He looked a little pale.

"Clare, Clare!" cried her mother, as the sound of his footstep descending the stairs died away; "how young, how very young, you are."

"Young, mother? what do you mean?"

"You youthful wiseacres are always ready to assume responsibilities and dictations that I, with my sixty years' experience, should never dare to set my hand to."

"Dictations? You don't mean that you think Herr Dahlmann meant to ask my opinion seriously on his own case? If I thought that I should have spoken still more strongly."

"You could hardly have done that, my dear. I don't suppose he did intend it beforehand, but he is uneasy, and it slipped out. I am very sorry for him myself, and I certainly should have been afraid to meddle. We know nothing of the girl, and she may be utterly unsuited to

him; men do make such mistakes; there is nothing so misleading as being a little in love. When you have lived as long in the world as I have, you will know there are worse things than a broken engagement. Still, of course, in one way I am glad you answered as you did. It is better so."

"Well," said Clare, "I spoke as I felt. It is just his being so upright, so straight, so true, so unlike the rest of the world, in short, that makes me value his friendship as I do. If I thought he had it in him to act in a mean, shifty way, I should hate him." And with that she lighted her candle and went away.

"What a very foolish old woman I am, to be sure," was the Countess' reflection as she lingered a minute, straightening one or two things about the room. "It is fortunate my daughter has better sense. I am very thankful really that her feelings are quite untouched. Even if he had been free, I should have been most reluctant to see her forming an attachment for a German, and in the profession too. I hope she may do far better than that. Still I am grieved for him, and blame myself for letting him come here so much. I am afraid he is very unhappy. I wonder if she sees how it is with him. I fancy she does, though she did so resent my trying to warn her. I doubt if he quite realizes it himself, but he is restless, and the old fetters begin to chafe. Ah, well, perhaps it is only a passing fancy, and when he gets home it will be all right. It is just as well he is going; at any rate, it will make a break."

Meanwhile Dahlmann was hurrying through the snowy streets, with his head bent against the cutting northeast wind, and a feeling within that was not unlike the meeting such a keen, adverse blast. He was hurt at Clare's tone, wounded in his self-approval, shocked at himself that he should have seemed to contemplate falseness to

his word, plighted with all the solemnity of a German betrothal, and should have drawn down upon himself such a stinging rebuke as lay in Miss Arrowsmith's last words. With a life as clean and a conscience as clear as a child's, he had something of the self-complacency of a child, and he was amazed at having a sudden contempt flashed upon him out of those keen-sighted eyes. Had he indeed deserved it? Was it, in truth, an unpardonable sin even to weigh the question whether the mistake he had made was irreparable, and to consider whether he was bound in honor to be faithful to his blunder through all his life? Lately, he hardly knew how, the knowledge had come to him that his friend had been right, that he did not love Hedwig; and the kindly fondness he had felt for her seemed woefully insufficient for his need.

He would fain have had a little respite wherein to fight it out with himself, to understand his own feelings, and decide where the perplexing cross-lines of right and wrong, which seemed so plain to Clare, really lay; but it could not be; in two days he would be in the Lindenthal again, and would have to take up one line or the other.

XI.

It is a curious sensation, no doubt, to return from an absence and find all our familiar surroundings changed while we have been away; but it is stranger still to come back with every feeling and interest altered, and find that life at home has stood still while we have moved so fast. Ehrenfried Dahlmann's seven months' absence had wrought in him like seven years; but in the Lindenthal everyone was doing precisely what they had done before he went away; no one looked a day older—as, indeed, how should they?—except Hedwig's kitten, which had developed into a cat. So short a distance he had been removed, and so short a time, and he felt like an alien in his old home.

Some such thoughts were passing through his mind as he leaned on the window-sill of the little schoolhouse in the Lindendorf, and gazed down the village street. There was old Gebhardt, the carpenter, as bandy-legged as ever, bending under the weight of his toolbag. There stood Frau Linz, with her broad white apron, almost filling up the doorway of her cottage, as she lingered gossiping with her neighbor, the Frau Schneiderin. He laughed as he recalled how she burst into the school to attack him one day for having administered well-deserved chastisement to one of her brood. How utterly far away those days seemed now!

He lifted his elbows from the sill, and, crossing the room, took up his old position at the raised desk and looked round. Nothing changed here either. His successor had not stamped any individuality of his own on

his surroundings, and, indeed, it would be difficult for the most original mind to make much impress on the furniture of a communal school. Dahlmann's fingers mechanically felt along the ledge and took hold of the ruler that lay still in its old place, symbol of the authority he used to wield; but the familiar touch of it would not bring back the old self.

It was in some sort to try and find that old self that he had come. He wanted to be alone with his own thoughts for a little, and the week that he had spent at home had been all bustle and confusion. He was staying at the wharf with his half-brother, and he and his wife were bent on making a lion of the distinguished tenor: of course all his old pupils wanted to see him, for the accounts of his success in the capital had figured largely in the local paper; and then there had been the Christmas festivities, and his daily visits to the mill. So, as the new schoolmaster was spending Christmas with his own friends at a distance, Ehrenfried had borrowed the key from the old woman left in charge, and, shaking off friends and neighbors with some difficulty, had come to visit the scene of his old life.

Was it in truth the same man who last week was sitting in the exquisite little drawing room in the Finkenwiese talking to Countess Malaxa and Miss Arrowsmith, and the week before was figuring on the boards as Siegfried before a brilliant audience, and to whom those things seemed now quite natural, who used month after month, year after year, to tread that monotonous round of daily duties, patiently correcting blotted copies and smeared sums, his interest bounded by the examinations and the good or evil behavior of the stolid lads and lasses over whom he ruled? He could hardly believe it. The old, dull, narrow life was laid aside like an outgrown garment, and the temper of mind that belonged to it had vanished

too. Gone were the old patience, contentment, self-complacency, good and bad alike, and in their place was a crowd of restless ambitions and half-comprehended longings that he could neither control nor give account of, and withal a self-disgust that was wholly new in his experience.

He did not like to own himself inconstant; yet what else did these misgivings mean? They had assailed him already in the last few weeks at Blankenstadt, and he had tried to assure himself that when he was at home again, removed from all disturbing influences, they would disappear, especially when he should see his betrothed once more in her fresh young beauty and affectionateness. Letters had been a poor substitute; he himself was never expansive on paper, and Hedwig's letters were formal little compositions that might have been copied from a Complete Letter Writer. Well, he had been with her constantly for a week now, and the charm had failed to work. She was not less pretty; rather more so, for she was not looking very strong, and hers was the kind of beauty to which delicacy adds a refining touch, but to his changed senses there was a lack. The expression of the soft mouth never varied, the pensive smile was always the same, her face never quickened in response to anything he said. He struggled vainly against the consciousness that the hours spent in her society were the dulllest since his return, and that after the first he seemed to have nothing to say to her nor she to him. In vain he tried to interest her in his work; she listened to descriptions of the opera with mild disapproval, and of his friends he never ventured to speak.

He leaned his head on his hand and tried to call up his old vision of her making a home in the little rooms behind the school, where his mother used to live and toil for him, but it was no use; the image of his mother dom-

inated; he thought of her with quick, reviving tenderness; Hedwig dropped out of the picture. And if out of this, how would she hold her own in the new framework? Would she in truth ever be able to make herself at home or happy there? Clare had been right; it was of her rather than of himself that he ought to think, and it might be well that he should consult her happiness best by putting an end to a mistaken situation. True, he had offered her her freedom once before; but that had been in the course of something very like a quarrel. He resolved he would have a quiet talk with her and ascertain if possible her real wishes.

When he at last raised his head he found that the short winter day was closing in. He locked the school, and turned his steps toward the parsonage; he would not go up to the mill that evening; he had made no promise to do so, and it would be wiser to sleep upon his resolution and do nothing in a hurry.

The Herr Pfarrer was out, they told him; gone down upon the ice, most probably; and thither he followed him, calling in at the wharf for his skates as he passed. The river here presented a great contrast to the gay crowded scene a score of miles below, at Blankenstadt. There were no torches nor music here to tempt the skaters to linger late; most had already dispersed; only here and there a black figure darted out of the shadow of the pines and crossed the cold white reaches. One of these Dahlmann thought he recognized, and started off in swift pursuit, hardly catching him till the belt of dark firs was passed, and the lingering glow from a few long red streaks of cloud caught their faces. It was Anton, and, sweeping past him, Dahlmann wheeled and brought up by his side.

"What, Ehren! My dear old boy, how glad I am! I have hardly had ten words with you since you came."

"I know; but it hasn't been my fault, you may be sure. The fact is, I found that my never having come home for a day had been taken rather amiss at the mill, so I felt I must make all the amends I could."

"To be sure. Well, I rather wondered myself you never came—so short a distance off as it is, after all."

"I suppose it was rather stupid, but I made up my mind that I would not let anything distract me till my training and probation were over. I wanted to be sure where I stood before I came home talking about things."

"I dare say you were wise, but your little Hedwig has pined. She will soon recover her roses though, now you have come."

Dahlmann gave a quick sigh, and the two swept on for several long rapid paces in silence. Then Anton asked: "Well, and is all satisfactory? Are you really going to stick to it?"

"Stick to it? To her, do you mean?"

"No, no! I mean to the work."

"I should think so! I believe I have got my foot firm on the ladder at last."

"That is all right. What made me ask was that letter you wrote me not so very long ago. You remember it?—full of forebodings. You are a meager letter writer in general; I have hardly heard from you since."

"Ah, yes, I know. I wrote in the midst of the worst moment of discouragement; stage fright, overwork, and all the rest of it. Thanks to Miss Arrowsmith, that is over now; I trust for good."

"The first soprano? You found your prejudice was unfounded, then?"

"She has been—she and her mother—the best friends I could have had. Without their counsel and friendliness I verily believe I should have come to grief. It is

a harder life than the good folks here, who imagine that a singer's existence is all play, have any conception of."

"I don't doubt it; and exceptionally so to you, beginning it so late. But it is worth it?"

"Abundantly," was the laconic response.

"Tell me more about her," resumed Anton after a pause; "what is she like?"

"How shall I describe her? It is all contradictions. Plain, I suppose, strictly speaking, and lighting up when she sings into a brilliancy that is something more than beauty. Very English in her manner; frank and reserved, cold and tender, fire and ice. Not a woman it would be safe to offend; but generous, with a sort of masculine way of looking at things."

"Do you know you are describing a very remarkable woman?"

"I know it; she is one in a thousand."

Another silence, while Reichardt questioned with himself what this might mean.

"What a distance we have come!" cried Dahlmann presently. "When one gets into the swing of skating it is like wings. I wonder how long it would take to fly down all those winding reaches to Blankenstadt?"

"My dear Ehren, is your work grown such a magnet that you would fain rush back and cut short your holiday?"

Dahlmann laughed. "I am a fool," he said, swinging round as he spoke. "Let us go back; it is getting dark."

"You have not told me about your plans yet," said his friend presently, as they beat up against the icy north-east wind with more labor than it had cost to come down. "You have entered on a permanent engagement now?"

"Five years. I believe the Intendant has driven rather a hard bargain with me; but of course I have to

get my name known beyond Blankenstadt before I can command my own terms. I shall be grinding away till July; then the opera closes for a couple of months, and—possibly—I shall come back and get married.”

“Possibly?”

“Did I say possibly; I did not mean it.”

Meantime tragic lamentations were going on at the mill. Hedwig had made up her mind that her betrothed would come up in the course of the afternoon, and could not settle to anything. One of her cousins had offered to take her out in his sleigh, but she refused the civility something curtly.

“I’d go if I were you, Hedwig,” said her youngest cousin, Käthe, who happened to be in the room.

“But, Käthe, Ehrenfried might come, and not find me.”

“So much the better,” said Käthe enigmatically, and took up her work again.

“I fancy he said something last night about skating. Will you bring your skates and come down to the river?” said Franz good-naturedly.

But Hedwig hated skating: in this December weather she liked to sit close against the stove, or she did not mind a sleigh ride, warmly muffled in furs and with a hot brick to her feet; but skating tired and chilled her, besides she might miss Dahlmann after all, so she spent her afternoon in doing nothing, that she might be at leisure to rush to the window every time she heard the gate click, and by the time Abendessen arrived, and still no lover, she had reduced her nerves to such an exasperated condition that there was nothing for it but to retire sobbing to her room.

“Where is Hedwig?” asked her aunt, as her eye traveled down the well-filled table and saw the vacant chair. It was a goodly muster, for the family party was

re-enforced by sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, both present and prospective.

"I think she has a headache, mother. I'll take her up a cup of tea," said good-natured Käthe, drawing herself from the detaining hand of her Fritz.

The plea of headache would never have been allowed in the case of one of her own children, but Hedwig, as they all knew, was her aunt's pet.

Käthe's knock on her cousin's door was unnoticed at first, and on repetition was answered by a lamentable voice from within. Hedwig wouldn't come down, wanted no tea, and would rather be let alone.

"Nonsense! Open the door directly, or I shall go and call mother."

At this the bolt was reluctantly withdrawn, and Hedwig, flushed, tear-stained, and disheveled, reseated herself upon the bed, turning away in disgust from the steaming cup her cousin offered.

"Now, Hedwig, do tell me what is the matter. Have you and Herr Dahlmann quarreled?"

"Quarreled! How could we? I haven't seen him since yesterday. What can I have done to offend him?"

"Offend him? Why, what makes you think he is offended?"

"He hasn't been near me all day." And forth gushed another flood of tears.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are such a goose as to make this fuss just because he didn't happen to come up to-day. He has been up every day except the once we went down to the wharf. Most likely he wanted to see something of his friends in the village. Fritz said just now he fancied he saw him and the Herr Pfarrer going off down the river just as he was leaving the ice."

"Ah, the Herr Pfarrer! He always comes between Friedel and me. I believe he hates me."

"Pooh," said Käthe; "I don't suppose he thinks a bit about you. Here, drink your tea and don't talk nonsense. Remember you have got another day; he's sure to come up to-morrow."

Hedwig took a few gulps and then resumed: "Ah, Fritz comes to see you every day, though he does not live a long way off, and only gets a week to see you in."

Käthe smiled and dimpled. "Oh, Fritz is a noodle," she said; "but, I am sure I would let him have a day off and welcome if he would bring me such lovely presents as Herr Dahlmann gives you. Just think of that beautiful locket you had for a Christmas gift! Of course I know Fritz can't afford such things, poor boy, but I can't help wishing he could."

"It is not his presents I want," said Hedwig tragically, "but himself."

"Well now, look here, Hedwig," said Käthe more seriously; "there is something more in this than mere pique because he was hindered coming up to-day. If you do really think he doesn't care for you, why don't you break it off?"

Hedwig flung up her hands. "Break it off! Oh, do you truly think he does not love me?" And she flung herself face downward along the bed.

Käthe looked puzzled; it seemed brutal to say, No, I don't think he does. "I only went by what you said," she answered. "I thought you seemed to think so yourself. You must know best."

Hedwig clutched her arm with a hot hand. "Tell me," she said.

"Well, since you ask me; you mustn't be vexed at my speaking out. It wouldn't content me, I know. He is always very kind and gentle, and he writes very regularly and sends you lots of pretty things; yet somehow he seems to me cold."

"I wish I was dead," moaned Hedwig from among the pillows.

"There, I am sorry I said anything," sighed her cousin. "I had better have held my tongue. And perhaps, after all, I am quite wrong. He is a cold, proud man naturally, and has different ways of showing what he feels to a simple sort of fellow like my Fritz."

Hedwig snatched at this consolation. "Yes," she said; "of course he is so different to all the rest."

Yet all the while she knew in her heart that her cousin was right; that it was not his kindness, his gentleness, his presents, his careful observance of all her wishes that would content her; she would give them all for one of those ardent looks she had seen Fritz bend upon her homely cousin.

"Now, I'll give you one piece of advice," said Käthe, taking the cup and preparing to leave the room; "don't lay yourself down as a door-mat for Ehrenfried to walk over. You are a vast deal too grateful for all his attentions. You may believe me, it never pays."

"Oh, I could never flout him as you do Fritz. I shouldn't dare; he is so different."

"Nonsense! For all his stateliness I expect he is pretty much like the rest of them; and you may rely on it men never care for what they can have too easy. Coming, mother!"

She ran down to find the sitting room deserted except by her mother, who was washing up the best china in a bowl of steaming water, preparatory to putting them in the glass-fronted cupboard. Käthe tucked up her sleeves, showing plump, mottled arms. "I'll do this, mother. You wipe."

"Well, and what was the matter with Hedwig?" said the Frau Mühlerinn, looking keenly through her spectacles. "Some lover's quarrel, I suppose. I wish to

goodness Dahlmann would marry her and have done with it. I hate such shilly-shally ways."

"Why, mother, I thought you didn't like him, and would be best pleased if it was off."

"I should have been better pleased if it had never been on. I should have said Nay to it long ago; but she has set her heart on him, it is easy to see, and if she is crossed it is my belief she'll go off just like her poor mother."

"I wonder," said Käthe, wiping a cup carefully, "if it would have been all right if he had married her last summer, as he meant at first, and taken her to the school-house, and there had been none of this singing and Blankenstadt?"

"You think it is not all right now, then? You young people understand each other best; but I have noticed she hasn't seemed to brighten up as I expected now he is here."

"I don't know what to think. He seems very attentive,—his not coming up this afternoon was nothing,—yet she has been crying her heart out. He is so cold and stiff; yet I don't think he means to be off it."

"Well, I shall let him know I won't have him playing fast and loose with my niece. She may be an orphan, but she has those that will take her part and see her righted. I shall have a word to say to my fine gentleman tomorrow."

"Shall you, mother? Rather you than I. I should be sorry to have to tackle him myself."

"It shall be one thing or the other, that I am determined," said the Frau Mühlerinn, polishing cups very carefully with a soft cloth. "I won't have Hedwig wasting her youth and losing her pretty looks in a long engagement while he is off amusing himself. And so I shall let him know."

"I really wouldn't interfere, if I were you," said the daughter apprehensively, as she carried off a completed pile of china. "I'd sooner by half be left to manage my lover for myself," she muttered, with her head in the cupboard, as she heedfully ranged the row; "and, upon my word, I don't see the use of being as pretty as Hedwig if one can't."

XII.

NEXT morning Ehrenfried took his way to the mill, slowly and lingeringly, with little of the ardor of a lover in his gait. He chose the path through the ravine, which he had not traversed since the day of his return from his first visit to Blankenstadt. As a rule, it was impassable in winter by reason of deep snow, and intercourse between the mill and the village had to be carried on by the high-road, which made a wide *détour*. But this year the snow was light and the frost was hard, so but for the slipperiness of the path, which clambered along by perilous edges, the shorter and prettier way was quite practicable.

Beautiful as the narrow gorge was in the glow of early summer, as he had first seen it, with the sunshine filtering through the fringe of branches overhead, it was even more exquisite now under the magic fingers of Jack Frost. The dark pines towered above, their scanty ranks just showing a narrow ribbon of palest blue, where the high rocky banks nearly met, and against their blackness the delicate birches stood forth clad in fairy filagree of silver. Summer's dainty embroidery of flower and fern was replaced by a lacework of sparkling white; not an ivy leaf but was edged round with tracery, not a blade of withered grass but bore its string of glittering gems.

The shadow was deep and cold, and the silence like the silence of a tomb. The twitter of birds, the hum of busy insects, all hushed by the grasp of winter's icy hand; the fall of a dry branch, snapped off by the weight of snow, and rattling down through the entanglement of stiffened boughs, broke the stillness with a startling and obtrusive

clatter, and the twinkle of the icicles, where the dwindling stream leaped down its stony bed and smote the long crystal fringes, made a momentary music. Then breathless silence again.

"I wish she were here. How she would enjoy this!" was the half-formed thought that sprang up unbidden. The pronoun was enough; already he had got into the habit of mentally turning to Clare Arrowsmith with anything that pleased him; any specially fair sight or lovely strain of music, or passage in a book that caught his fancy. She always understood.

And then came a very different thought. Just here was the spot which, eight months ago, had witnessed that quarrel with Hedwig about his new career which had left him with such sore misgivings. How she had reproached him; how bitterly she had wept! Poor little thing! it was hardly her fault. It had been a mistake, and the blame was his. It was humiliating and miserable; but he must try if it could not even now be set right. He felt he ought to have spoken when he first came back; but he had been a coward. He flushed hotly when he thought that he might have to encounter Clare's scorn. There were small wisdom, though, in marrying a woman he did not love at the bidding of another. He cut short his musings with an impatient sigh and quickened his pace.

The window of the office in which the Frau Mühlerinn spent her mornings balancing her books and taking orders overlooked the path by the ravine, and all the morning she had kept one eye on her accounts and one on the gate, so no sooner did Dahlmann's hand rest upon the latch than she darted out and waylaid him.

"I want a word with you, Dahlmann, if you please," said she, leading the way down the passage and opening the door of the best room. "Come in here a minute; we shan't be disturbed."

The "best room" of a German home is usually the least comfortable, and this was no exception. It was a grim apartment; the large round table that occupied the middle was covered with a dreadful material, hard and glazy to the eye, cold and slippery to the touch, and upon it, at equal distances, were ranged albums of views of the neighborhood and works of piety with strict impartiality in a radiating form, starting from a bead-mat on which rested a glass shade cherishing a ghastly bouquet of worsted flowers. The hard discomfort of the chairs was thinly veiled by woolen antimacassars of elaborate pattern in which violet and green were the predominating colors, and the immaculate whiteness of the tall porcelain stove suggested that it was for ornament rather than use.

The Frau Mühlerinn seated herself in an armchair with her back to the window, from which advantageous position she glared severely at Ehrenfried through her spectacles as he stood before her, leaning one shoulder against the chilly stove, waiting for her to begin.

Nature had intended the Frau Tante for a soft woman; she was pillowy of figure, rotund and doughy of countenance, with blunt features and large pale eyes; but a hard life had developed a toughness which those who had dealings with her were soon made aware of. The stalwart miller she had married had turned out one of the limpest and most incapable of men, and she had managed his business, dragooned him into good behavior, and brought up her large family by the power of the rod. She was far from repining when it pleased Providence to remove her incubus, and still, though nominally the mill was in the hands of her eldest son, all important transactions passed through her hands.

If, however, discipline predominated in her maternal management, there was one soft spot in her heart and one spoilt child in her home, and that one, oddly enough,

not one of her own healthy, uninteresting flock, but her little orphan niece, her favorite sister's child. For Hedwig, from the day she arrived, a frail, blue-eyed baby of two, all strict laws were relaxed; the warmest corner, the prettiest clothes, the first claim for treats, were hers as of right, and if she were fractious her aunt cosseted her as she had never cosseted any of her own red-cheeked brood. Nothing, indeed, roused her to such wrath with her own boys and girls as any attempt to domineer over their little cousin, and, to do the children justice, far from resenting the favoritism, they all combined in spoiling the pretty child who was younger than themselves, and, orphan though she was, she had grown up in an atmosphere of petting such as falls to the lot of few.

It was on Hedwig's behalf that the Frau Tante had undertaken to beard the, even to her, somewhat formidable singer.

She cleared her throat and began: "I should like to understand, Herr Dahlmann, what you mean. I'll not have any shilly-shallying with Hedwig, I'd have you to know."

"Pray, explain what you mean by shilly-shallying; there has been nothing of the sort, in my judgment." He spoke in a quiet, level voice, but not without a hint of anger.

"Why, here have you been a week hanging about her, and never a word said yet of fixing the day."

"I thought you understood, as Hedwig certainly did before I left Lindendorf, that until I had made more certain way in my new profession, it would be wise to postpone our marriage. If you are dissatisfied——"

"Dissatisfied! Of course her friends are all dissatisfied. When you asked my consent you spoke of the next summer holidays, and here we are the other side of Christmas!"

"My prospects were different then. Though they are more ambitious now, there is an amount of uncertainty that hardly justifies me——"

The Frau Mühlerinn broke in: "Ambitious, forsooth! It is all folly and vanity. If you had cared about the child's happiness you would have stuck to the nice respectable position you had got. If I had known you were going to lead a godless life at the theater, I should never have given my consent, never."

She had worked herself into a considerable heat. Ehrenfried tried to speak, but she broke in again:

"I have been deceived in you. I thought you a quiet, steady man who would make her a good husband; being so much older, too, you would have had thought for her."

She stopped to take breath, and he, straightening himself, said quietly, "You wish her to give me up?"

"Give you up! I only wish she would. It is too late to talk of that now. If I was to insist on her breaking it off, it is my belief she'd fret herself into a decline and follow her poor mother. And that is what she will do if this sort of thing goes on. She's losing her flesh and her pretty color, as you'd see for yourself if you had eyes in your head."

"I know she is looking pale, but is it my fault? Is she unhappy?"

"Didn't she cry her eyes out last night because you had never been near her? And you should see how she watches for the postman, when she thinks maybe he has a letter from you. You have spoiled her life, and now you talk of breaking it off as coolly as of changing an old coat!"

Ehrenfried was stung. "I don't know what right you have to take this tone with me," he said. "I did not speak of breaking it off: I inquired whether you wished

her to do so, since you seemed to have so bad an opinion of me. If the engagement makes her miserable, for Heaven's sake put an end to it! I have promised to marry your niece, and I am willing to fulfill my promise. It is for you to say whether it is to go on or not."

He was acutely conscious, if she was not, how utterly wrong the whole position was—how completely they were compromising Hedwig's dignity between them. He seemed to have got into a labyrinth from which he saw no straight way out but by trampling on the happiness of the girl who had trusted him. His had been the blame, and his must be the atonement. He saw the risk; but the sacrifice of his own happiness must not be considered so long as he did not sacrifice hers.

"This sort of thing shall not go on, at any rate," said the Frau Mühlerin. "Fix the day, and I'll not say Nay; though," she added, "it will go hard with me to part with her. But I won't have her eating her heart out, with nothing to look to but years perhaps of waiting. As to your ambitions and your successes I wouldn't give that for them." And she snapped her fingers contemptuously.

Dahlmann took out his pocketbook and consulted it.

"Would the twenty-eighth of January do?" he asked, as though he were fixing the date for a party. "I see I can command three days at the end of that week, though it would be impossible for me to ask for more leave at present. It would just allow time for the necessary announcement in the papers. I shall not, of course, be able to take a house for her just yet, but no doubt I can get rooms, or we can begin in the pension where I have been staying."

"The twenty-eighth of this next January as ever is! Four weeks next Tuesday! Why, God bless the man! However do you suppose all the furniture and things is to be got in the time?"

"It will not be necessary; it will be better in many ways to begin in a furnished flat. It will be some time before I really know what sort of a house I can afford. I had thought of one a little way out of the town, but we can consider that later."

"Well, I'll see about it. To be sure, all her clothes and her house linen and that has been ready these six months. She'll come to you well seen to. I will speak to her about it at once."

"No, thank you. I prefer to speak to her myself." And he left the room.

The Frau Tante found herself quite breathless with the astonishment of her sudden victory. To do her justice, she did not want to get rid of her niece, but the notion that Hedwig's orphaned condition had been taken advantage of roused her wrath, and the instinctive desire of getting the better of her adversary had perhaps led her farther than she contemplated at first.

"Well," she said to herself, with an attempt at self-congratulation, "it just shows what a little firmness will do. Men are all alike; stand up to them, and they'll knock under, be they never so grand."

Dahlmann stood a few moments in the passage to collect himself. The encounter had been a sharp one, and he felt as if a storm of hailstones had been rattling about his ears. When a naturally deliberate man acts on impulse he does it more completely than others, and he was astonished to find how far his intentions had traveled in a quarter of an hour. Yet he thought he was right: if he had, as her aunt averred, broken Hedwig's heart and ruined her health, the sooner he made amends the better; delay, absence, doubt would only aggravate her feelings, and if, as was threatened, she should become seriously ill, he would never forgive himself.

He crossed the hall, and went into the sitting room

where the girls were all gathered round the stove, busy with needlework—all but Hedwig; she was sitting in a rocking-chair in the warmest corner, a set of languid knitting-needles in her hand making a pretense of employment. He saw that her eyes looked heavy and swollen, and she sprang to her feet, flushing and paling at his entrance. One of the cousins hastily cleared the chair next Hedwig of a pile of mending, but he would not sit down.

"Will you come out with me a little, Hedwig? There is quite a sheltered walk under the south wall in the orchard. I want to talk to you, and a little fresh air will do you good."

His voice was unusually soft and gentle, and she assented with a tremulous delight that was rather pathetic, and went to get her wraps. Käthe looked up at him as he stood silently waiting.

"She isn't very well to-day," she said. "She fancied you would have come yesterday, and it upset her."

"I am sorry. I did not know she expected me."

Then Hedwig came back, and the two went out together.

"Do you know," said Luise, taking a pin out of her mouth to speak with more effect, "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he meant to break it off; he was so solemn. I don't think he cares much about her, do you?"

"It would be abominable of him, if he does," said Fanni. "She'll fret herself sick, poor little soul!"

"Well," said Käthe, "I am not so sure. I believe if it was once over and done with, she'd soon perk up again. It is the having him away and growing strange that does the mischief."

Meanwhile Hedwig had been trying to act upon her cousin's half-comprehended advice, and assert herself by pouting and reproaching him for yesterday's absence, but he cut her short kindly but unceremoniously.

"Never mind that now, my dear; there was no unkindness intended. I think it is our having been apart so long that makes these little misunderstandings arise. I am sure you don't think I would willingly neglect you. Your aunt has been telling me that you have not seemed well lately, and this long engagement tries you——"

"Oh, no, No!" she broke in breathlessly, with a frightened look in her eyes.

"And so," he went on quietly, "I was going to ask you if you would mind beginning life in lodgings, not waiting till I can afford a house, and we might be married now, soon."

"Oh, Ehren! Do you really mean it? How soon?"

The abject gratitude in her tone half touched, half jarred upon him.

"Would the end of next month be hurrying you too much? I could get away better then than later."

"Oh, no! My things are all made. I marked the last set of towels before you came. But aunt! What will she say?"

"Oh, she will not make any objection," he said with a touch of dryness, "I have spoken to her already."

A momentary silence of misgiving fell on Hedwig. She had heard her aunt mutter more than once during the last week that she would cut the matter short one way or the other. Was it possible that this speedy marriage had been pressed upon him by her family? Her pride was almost a minus quantity, but what little residuum there was, shrank.

"Are you sure," she said in a timid, deprecating tone, looking down and poking at the snow with the point of her shoe, "are you quite sure this is really what you wish?"

He stopped and took her hand. "What I wish is that we should do what is best for your happiness. Now I

have got a permanent engagement at the Blankenstadt Theater, there is really no imprudence if you do not mind beginning in a small way. Your aunt does not wish our engagement to go on otherwise. So it is for you to decide. I will do my best to make you happy."

So it had been her aunt's doing, not his unprompted desire. She hesitated. Dread of town life, sickness of heart at the thought of leaving home, above all the sense that this was not how she would fain be wooed, rushed over her, and for an instant she had almost resolved to say, "Let it all end; it has been a mistake. I cannot go." And then, not love, but vanity spoke. Should she lose her lover—be pitied as a girl forsaken, who could not bind a man to her side even by plighted vows. No, she could not face it. He was hers, and she would keep him. She looked up at him.

"Did you think I should care whether it were lodgings or anything else? Let it be as soon as you will."

But even as he kissed her she burst into a flood of tears and rushed away to her own room.

Late that evening she was looking out of her own little window. She had gone up to bed early, glad to escape the noisy congratulations downstairs, but she could not sleep, and crept behind the curtain. Filmy gray clouds had drifted up over the moon, and a few light flakes of snow were falling. She heard the house door open and Fritz's voice taking leave. Käthe ran down to the gate with him, in spite of the snow, with a white shawl over her head, and Hedwig could watch their parting, and see him return again and yet again for one more word.

She drew back and let fall the curtain with a heavy sigh.

XIII.

THE wind was howling round the corner of the parsonage, and winding the snow in soft rustling handfuls against the windows. Not an evening one would go out for choice, and Anton Reichardt was congratulating himself that his day's work was over, and he might abandon himself to the luxury of his armchair in the corner by the stove and the ease of slippers and Schlaf-rock. Arrayed in this peculiarly German garment, he yet managed to look more like a monk than ever, for it was of gray duffle with a Capuchin hood, and the cord and tassels at the waist might very well represent a rope girdle. He was as usual deep in his books; every chair within reach of his hand was loaded with tomes big and little, and there was a huge one on his knee on which rested a notebook in which he scribbled from time to time.

He was not best pleased when a bell clanged through the little house with an impatient summons. It must surely be some case of immediate need, some mortal sickness or hasty baptism to send anyone in search of him on such a night. But the sound of a voice in the hall made him spring up and open the study door. He had not been mistaken; it was Dahlmann knocking the snow from his boots and shaking a powdering from his broad shoulders.

"Come in, old fellow, come in. Why, how wet you are! I hardly looked to see you again."

As he spoke he was clearing the chair nearest the stove of its load of books and papers.

Ehrenfried followed his friend in and sat down rather wearily. He did not volunteer any explanation of his unlooked-for appearance, and his host forebore to ask questions, but, tipping his chair back, reached a long pipe from the rack behind him and handed it over with the remark: "There, take your old friend and comfort your soul; the tobacco jar is just by you. You must have had a cold walk."

"I had and no mistake. I am on my way down from the mill, so I just looked in to say——" He paused and cleared out the bowl of his pipe very carefully with his little finger. "Upon my word I am rather ashamed to tell you."

Anton looked up eagerly. A certain piece of news that Dahlmann might well feel ashamed to communicate would have been exceedingly welcome to his friend.

"Well," he said, "out with it."

"Why, the fact is I want to ask for your professional services rather sooner than I had thought. We have decided that the wedding is to be in the end of January."

Reichardt turned his chair a little, and gazed at him without speaking for a moment, his pipe suspended between two fingers. Then he said: "The end of January! Why, you must be dreaming."

Ehrenfried gave a short, dull laugh. "No, I don't think I am; it is serious, sober earnest."

"You amaze me. Was it really no longer ago than last night you said to me: 'In July—possibly—I may get married?'"

"Say what you like. I am a changeable, impulsive idiot, I suppose. Haven't people in my condition a prescriptive right to be hurried away by their feelings?"

"I wish to Heaven I could think you were. If I thought your prudence was borne down by an overmastering passion I should not be so unhappy about you."

Dahlmann winced, but he answered only one word of the sentence.

"It is not really so imprudent as you may fancy; practically, the experimental stage of my career is well over. My fresh agreement will be signed when I go back, so we shall at any rate be sure of bread and butter. My reason for thinking yesterday it would be best to wait till the summer was that the initial expenses are heavy for costumes and lessons, and so on, and I thought I should like to have been able to take a little house out of the town for her. However, she says she does not mind beginning in a furnished flat. Besides, later I should have had more leisure; the work is very exacting at this time of year; I was afraid she would be lonely."

"It was her wish, then?"

"Her aunt's. I see you won't be satisfied unless I make a clean breast of it. The truth is, I found this morning that my not going up yesterday had been taken as an affront, and worked up into a tremendous grievance, and I was summoned to a private conference with the Frau Mühlerinn. I can't tell you all she said; women are apt to be a trifle incoherent when they are excited; but the upshot was she accuses me of trifling with Hedwig and making her miserable. What could I say? You noticed yourself she was looking delicate, poor little thing. I am afraid I have been inconsiderate; I have been so taken up and distracted. I have not written as regularly as I ought to have done." He paused.

"Well?"

"Finally she set before me the alternative of an immediate marriage or breaking it off altogether."

"Then, my dear boy, why, in Heaven's name, didn't you take your freedom?"

"Why? Because I am not a scoundrel."

"Surely you take an exaggerated view. There could be no dishonor when the thing was offered to you."

"Simply this. It sounds conceited to say it, Anton, but Hedwig would break her heart. She has been ailing all the autumn, and her aunt told me seriously that if she had any more grief and disappointment about her engagement she believed she would go into a decline."

"And you are to be sacrificed."

"I don't know why you take it for granted that there is any sacrifice. I have never said I wished to be free."

"Your answer to my question just now said as much. Do you know when you came in I made sure you had come to announce the breaking off, not the fulfillment, of your engagement. I have felt from the first that you would some day find out that that little shallow, trivial nature could not——"

Ehrenfried stretched out his hand. "Hush," he said, "you must not say that to me."

"You are right. I beg your pardon. I had no business to speak it out. Well, if you feel it is your duty I suppose you must go through with it, but I wish I could think it was for your real happiness."

"After all, you must admit that my business is not to consider my own happiness, but hers. She thinks it is bound up in me, and I gave her the right to think so eight months ago. That she has not changed is certainly not to her discredit."

"True. But I wonder whether you are really consulting her happiness by going on when your heart is not in it. I doubt if you at all estimate the strain you are putting on her as well as yourself. She will always be craving from you more than you can give. You don't know what the demands and exactions of married life are; no one does who has not lived it."

"I question, though," said Dahlmann, "whether most wedded lives do come up to the highest ideal as you have known it. I trust I shall be able to make her happy, and certainly I have no right to pity myself in taking to wife a pretty, gentle, good girl who was my own free choice not a year ago. Don't talk of it any more: it is the sort of thing that won't bear handling. Talking only puts into shape notions and misgivings which one had better throttle without looking at them."

Reichardt had risen from his chair, and was tramping about the room in much perturbation of spirit.

"I cannot conceal my anxiety," he said. "You own you have misgivings, and presently it will be too late to listen to them."

Ehrenfried looked at his friend with the straight simplicity of gaze that was characteristic of him. "But, Anton," he said, "you surely would not have had me break my plighted word!"

"Of course not; but all along I have thought that possibly she too would come to feel it had been a mistake, and you might have parted by mutual consent. Neither she nor her friends have ever been quite satisfied since your change of occupation. Is it absolutely certain that she would not wish for re-consideration, or at least delay?"

"Absolutely. Let us say no more. If I were to break with her, and she fretted and pined herself sick, and—I could never forgive myself. And now this subject must be closed once for all. Don't worry yourself about me, old man. You will see it will all come right. We shall settle down into a regular humdrum, happy couple, and you will laugh at your forebodings. She will make a capital little housewife, and I am sure a man would be a brute who could not make himself content with such an affectionate little soul, Hallo! do you know what time

it is? I must be off, or my good brother and his wife will think I have been making a night of it."

"It is still snowing. Can't you stay with me to-night? My old Betti will make your room ready in a trice."

Dahlmann shook his head. "No, no, thanks. I shall be all right; I shall be there in twenty minutes, and if I did not turn up they would think I was lost in the Grund, and send out a search party. I shall rather enjoy a tussle with the wind and snow."

He was buttoning himself into his greatcoat as he spoke. Then he laid his two hands on his friend's shoulders. "You think a great deal more of me than I deserve," he said; "but I look to you to make me better and not worse than I should be without you. Try and be more prosaic. Good-night."

He went off, vanishing quickly down the steep, dark road, and Anton stood in the lighted doorway and watched him till his figure was but a dim blur among the snow-flakes. Well, every man must needs go forth through the shadows and obstacles of his own life alone, and no friend, standing by, can dictate the road to him.

XIV.

“WELL, mother, is the doll’s house completed to your satisfaction?”

Clare Arrowsmith stood in the doorway of the little flat “au troisième” which Ehrenfried had taken to bring his bride to—rather which Madame Malaxa had taken for him; for when he came to her in all the haste and perplexity of his sudden wedding, she had undertaken all the arrangements with enthusiasm, leaving him only the innumerable legal formalities to see to. Besides her affection for him and desire to help him, it was just the business in which her soul delighted. She pounced upon a little furnished flat, just out of the Furker Strasse, lately vacated by some friends of her own; she moreover engaged a cook who had formerly been in her service, and was now busy putting those little final touches that make a habitation into a home.

Clare peeped in at the open door, and just glanced round at the snowy whiteness; her mother was standing before the tall mirror, sticking pins into a big rose-colored toilet cushion. “I will go into the salon and put these in water,” she said, for her hands were full of daffodils and white jonquils.

“Have you remembered the ink?” she called presently through the open doorway.

“Yes; I got some as I came along, and filled the stands both there and on Herr Dahlmann’s writing table. I do wish,” she added discontentedly, as she came from the inner room, letting the *portière* fall behind her, “I do wish I had clean towels to put out; it does look so

bare without them; but as the bride brings all the linen with her trousseau, they won't be able to wash their hands till she has unpacked. My dear, you have a gift for arranging flowers; the room looks perfect now."

"I think it wants the tea table out to make it quite complete," responded Clare, unfolding the leaves of a small Sutherland table, and drawing it between the stove and the fire. "Let us set out the tea-things; that will be the finishing touch, and as they arrive in the afternoon they will be sure to be glad of it."

"Not tea, dear, coffee. You may be sure Frau Dahlmann never touches tea except at Abendessen."

"True. I wonder if she makes it in a muslin bag as they used to do when I was at school, and uses the same for a week? Well, we will tell Gretel to have some coffee ready brewed for them."

As they took a final look round at their handiwork, before departing, a voice behind them said: "What a nest for a pair of love-birds!"

"Why, Herr Graf, what brings you here?" cried Clare, turning quickly.

"Partly inquisitiveness, I candidly own," replied the Intendant; "but this was my excuse"—holding out a roll of music. "I promised you should have first look at the new score, and as I was pursuing you with it I met your maid, who told me where you were to be found. You and Madame have indeed created a bower of bliss out of the old Miss Cockerton's quarters. Do you suppose that wretched fellow deserves the trouble you are taking for him?"

"Oh, you must not be hard upon him, Herr Graf," said the Countess. "If you were so bent on keeping him from matrimony you should not have let him go home at Christmas. After all, you were the best judge of the risk, for you are the only person who has seen the young lady."

"And I admit the strength of the excuse. A very dainty little piece of rustic loveliness. All the worse for his chances of distraction. We shall have him late at rehearsal, and at the performance, his eyes, instead of being on the conductor's baton, will be roaming to some corner of the zweiter rang."

"Nonsense! He will be far more settled now he is married than when his body was here and his heart twenty miles up the river."

For Madame Malaxa had quite persuaded herself of the illusory nature of her fancies about his affections before he went away. No doubt, there had been some little misunderstanding, some lovers' quarrel, arising from separation: that his love had overborne his prudence proved that quite conclusively.

Unluckily, the language of surroundings, of certain groupings of furniture, flowers, draperies, says different things to different tastes, and the arrangements which to one were evidences of kindly interest and sympathy appeared to the other, the person for whose gratification they were chiefly designed, simply outlandish. Ehrenfried looked round on his domain with delighted proprietorship; he had had no idea so much could have been made of it; it really had quite a look of the drawing room in the Finkenwiese.

"Well, Liebchen, what do you think of your new home?" he asked, turning his pleased eyes upon her.

"It is a nice room," she said temperately, as she pulled off her gloves and straightened a chair. "It will look very different when I have got it all a little to rights and unpacked my own chairbacks and things. What odd ideas Gretel has, to be sure."

"I don't fancy Gretel has had much to do with it," said Ehren, as his eye fell on the flowers scattered in all directions in Clare's characteristic, haphazard fashion, but

with an effectiveness, an adjustment of color that made them look exactly right; "I think I see the handiwork of my kind friends, Madame Malaxa and her daughter; they promised to look in and see that all was in order for you. I am sure those flowers must have come from them."

"Then I think they might have given me a flower table," said Hedwig with a pout; "they knew I was a bride."

"A flower table! I don't suppose they thought of it; you see, they are foreigners. I wish I had thought of ordering one for you. You shall have one another day. They have been so kind; I am sure they would not have neglected anything they thought would please you. I don't know how I should have got any sort of a home ready for you in the time if it had not been for them."

Hedwig put up her face to kiss him. "Dear, I did not mean to be critical; I am sure you have done your very best. Of course, men don't understand this sort of things, and if there had been more time aunt and I could have come down and seen to it all ourselves. I dare say your friends were very kind while you were a bachelor, but now you have got me you won't want them to be interfering."

It was perhaps as well that at this moment the servant entered with the coffee pot.

"Move those cups and things onto the large table, Gretel," said her mistress; "I am sure they are not safe on that rickety little stand."

Next morning Hedwig, left to herself, worked her own will among her things. Half an hour after her husband had departed to rehearsal the flower table arrived, and gave great satisfaction. It was a kind of solid cushion of blossom with "Glückwunsch" done in purple pansies in the middle, and to it was assigned a place of honor in

the center window. The furniture had already begun to waltz about the room with the assistance of Gretel's robust arms. The sofa, a rather cumbrous affair, which, however, had looked very comfortable with its foot toward the stove, and the light falling behind it, was now wheeled to the opposite end of the room and placed against the wall, a position which would prevent its occurring to anyone to lie upon it. So much the better for its damask cover; for the embroidered art blanket thrown over the end was folded up and put away, so was one of the down pillows. Who ever heard of a sofa having two? One would think it was a bed. The writing table had been across another corner, so placed to catch the light from the farther window. However convenient it might appear to a writer, such a lopsided arrangement could not be permitted; it was pushed close in front of the sofa, exactly in the middle, and the sofa flanked with two chairs on this side, two chairs on that, with their backs against the wall; really things began to look quite shipshape. An old-fashioned rosewood center table, which had presented almost insurmountable difficulties to Clare, was now dragged triumphantly from the seclusion to which she had consigned it, and took up a proud position in the very middle of the room. It would hold Hedwig's treasures of woolly mats and wax flowers beautifully, but first she must dispose of a sketch in a plain oak frame on a small easel which had stood upon it, a dreary-looking thing, in Hedwig's opinion: a traveler on a white horse, crossing a stretch of moorland country under a lowering sky. Even if it had been a prettier subject, she conceived that the wall was the only proper place for a picture. It was a pity she had no other small one to balance it; her aunt's colored print of the Empress Augusta would have been just the size. Well, never mind; it must go on a blank space above the tall

pier glass between the windows. This involved a hammer and nails and an adventurous clamber from a chair to the top of a bookcase; but it was safely accomplished, and the sketch effectually skied; possibly a few inches higher because she had deciphered the monogram C. A. in the corner.

She was getting tired, but several minor details still claimed her attention; Clare's languid daffodils and sweet-nancies had to be collected from the various tall slender glasses in which she had disposed them singly, or in twos and threes, their stems all cut to the same length, and crammed into a gay vase of painted china, which vase formed the center ornament of the round table, together with a bead-mat which was one of Hedwig's presents. Finally, the music stool was arrayed in a species of night-cap, netted in white cotton with a good deal of frill, and the armchairs having received similar adornments, Hedwig sat down and surveyed her domain with delighted satisfaction: it might almost rival the "beste Stube" at the mill. She had a virtuous sense of having spent a most industrious morning, and to play mistress among her own things was new and delightful.

Just one thing more, and she would have done. The last downy sofa pillow was whipped off, and its place supplied by a stodgy squab covered with worsted work and beads. She had finished just in time; there was the sound of her husband's returning step upon the stairs. How pleased he would be!

He open the door, and stood a moment on the threshold, pulling his long mustache with a slightly bewildered air. His first idea was that he had mistaken the flat, but before he could act upon it, he perceived his wife standing by the sofa, patting and punching her beloved cushion. He did not at once take in exactly what had happened to the room; his masculine perceptions only grasped the idea

that a blight of some kind seemed to have fallen upon it. Before he made any remark Hedwig spoke:

"I have been so busy this morning you can't think," she cried cheerfully; "I have been putting the room to rights. I never saw anything like the muddle it was in; chairs and tables anywhere but in their proper places, and even the flowers seemed to have gone crazy. Now, what do you think of it?"

Ehrenfried's breath was so completely taken away that he could only murmur feebly: "Why, my dear, I thought it all looked so pretty yesterday. I expected you would have been pleased."

Hedwig went close to him and laid a deprecating hand upon his arm. "It was not your fault, dear; you must not think I meant to reproach you; but it wanted a woman's hand, don't you see?"

"A woman's hand! You don't suppose I achieved all that pretty arrangement myself? Madame Malaxa most kindly volunteered to look after all the little details for me, and Miss Arrowsmith has the best taste of any woman I know: their drawing room is a little paradise."

"I hate English ways," said Hedwig venomously; "and there is nothing I should detest like having Englishwomen coming meddling in my house. I wish you had not asked them to interfere."

"At any rate," said Ehrenfried with rising irritation, "I think you might have left things as they were just for a little while, till after their first visit. It looks so ungrateful to pull all their handiwork to pieces." He turned away as he spoke and went into his dressing room. He was conscious that on this their first morning in their new home they were drifting into something perilously like a quarrel, and it were best to say no more. That the door should have slammed behind him was the unlucky result of haste, not of temper, but the effect was the same.

He had had a hard and exhausting morning. A new score had been tried for the first time, and his own part was not only a very fatiguing one, but did not appeal to his taste. Weary and hungry he hastened home, expecting to find dinner ready and a pretty wife to welcome him with smiles. He waited, however, with exemplary patience for nearly half an hour, then at last, getting no summons, came out in search of wife and servant. The latter was just beginning to lay the cloth, the former he found abandoned to tears in the midst of the achievement that had given her so much innocent pride.

He was truly sorry and remorseful; he felt he must have behaved atrociously to have reduced her to such an abject condition; he was ashamed that for such a trifle, for the position of a few tables and chairs, he should have appeared so unreasonably angry. He apologized, consoled, conjured; for a while in vain; Hedwig's easily flowing tears were less easily stanchd, but at length peace was restored, and she murmured a magnanimous offer to "put it all back."

"No, no!" he said; "it is your own room, and you shall have it just as you like it best. We will say no more about it." Possibly he was aware that, with the best intentions, to recreate what she had destroyed would be quite beyond his wife's powers.

A reconciliation scene, however satisfying to a woman, is to her husband scarcely so restorative as dinner, and by the time they sat down to viands which the undirected efforts of Gretel had made both overdone and cold, the point of appetite was past. When evening came he felt jaded, and his voice was toneless and uncertain.

"I knew how it would be," said the Intendant: "Dahlmann is so absorbed with his pretty bride we shall get no effective work out of him this season."

XV.

It must certainly be a trying ordeal that a German bride has to go through in paying instead of receiving her first visits, but in Hedwig's case they were not very numerous. Few of his colleagues or their wives had been so friendly to Dahlmann that the attention was due to them, and as to Frau Rauch, wisely or unwisely, he would not allow his wife to visit her on any account; on some points his ideas were decidedly rigid. Frau Pappelheim he knew no harm of, though he did not like her or her husband; but she had been good-natured, and a call must be made upon her, and upon two or three of the other ladies who had been civil to him.

First of all, of course, he must take his bride to present to Countess Malaxa, but there had been a blunder about the time they were to go, and she and her daughter were both out. Hedwig was relieved to hear a "not at home" at that, to her formidable door, and in the rebound of her spirits responded with a warmth that was almost effusive to Frau Pappelheim's friendly overtures. Set at her ease, she chattered away rather to the surprise of his husband, who sat by, an unwilling auditor, while she was being put in possession of a complete *résumé* of the *Chronique Scandaleuse* of the opera company. He cut both gossip and visit as short as he decently could; the last thing he desired was to see his wife on intimate terms with the "Frau Plappenmaul," as she was called.

Next Sunday was the day on which the return of these visits might be expected, and the dreaded encounter

with the soprano and her mother must take place. Hedwig spent more than an hour anxiously arraying herself, and was still intently occupied fixing a refractory plait more firmly in its place when her husband entered the room and came up behind her, looking over her shoulder at her reflection in the glass.

"Why, my dear wife, what have you been doing to yourself?" was his hasty exclamation, as he turned her round to face him.

She looked up at him, started, then glanced back at the image she had just been contemplating with so much satisfaction. She certainly had contrived to work a wonderful transformation in her appearance in a short time. She usually wore her pretty fair hair wound round her head in a single thick coil, and the simplicity of the style suited well the shape of the small head and slender throat; but to-day, in order to produce a more fashionable effect, it had been tortured into a multitude of plaits, twists, and loops, and skewered through in all directions with a variety of tortoise-shell ornaments. The elaborate coiffure seemed to put her small features quite out of countenance. Her best frock—a bright, hard blue, ill-cut and trimmed abundantly with gimp—was of such a very determined shade that her soft fair coloring was quite eclipsed and deadened.

"What is the matter?" she repeated in a tone of acute disappointment. "Don't you like my hair done in the new way?"

"Is that the new way?" said Ehrenfried discontentedly; "then I like the old better. Can't you do it in that nice thick coil? It looks somehow as if you had got a wig on."

Poor Hedwig laid down the back-hair glass with a despairing gesture. "It took me nearly an hour to do," she said, and the ever-ready tears welled up.

Recollecting with dismay the scene that had followed his criticisms on her improvements in the drawing room, he hastened to offer consolation. "Never mind, dear, it is all my ignorance; no doubt, it is quite the right thing; only you must forgive me for wishing you to look your prettiest, and liking you best as I am used to see you."

She was appeased at once. "I know it is right," she said; "this is how they are wearing it this year. Betti Schlemil, my eldest cousin's betrothed, taught me how to do it; she comes from Dandlau, you know, and Dandlau is such a very fashionable place in the season. She gave me all these lovely pins too."

"Well, make haste, Liebchen; someone might come. You have been an age dressing."

"Tie this for me, there's a dear." She held out to him a string of Bohemian glass beads with long blue ribbons to fasten round her neck, a facsimile of some she had seen Frau Pappelheim wear. She would be quick to pick up some fashions, it appeared.

"You haven't said how you like my new frock," she observed while he was fumbling with the ribbons. "You always said blue was your favorite color."

"It is very smart," said Ehren warily, made wise by experience. "What has become of that blue gown you used to wear when I was at home?—a sort of soft woolly stuff, something the color of your eyes."

"Oh, that old thing! Why, Friedel, what a silly you are! Even when it was new I should never have dreamt of putting that on to see company."

He felt a little disappointed that his pretty wife should not look her best before his friends, but evidently criticism was worse than useless. He saw her established in the midst of her reformed "*beste Stube*," right in front of her flower table, which she would not part with,

though its freshness by this time was somewhat tarnished, and then broke gently to her the unlucky fact that he had to go out.

"I shan't be more than twenty minutes, dear," he said consolingly. "Ten to one no one will come till I get back. The Herr Kapellmeister has sent such an urgent message for me to come round that I must go."

Hedwig's face fell. "How cruel of him! when he must have known that I should receive to-day. Do send and say you are engaged."

"Impossible, love; but the sooner I go the sooner I shall get back. Don't be frightened; if Countess Malaxa comes early, as I expect she will, she will help you. Auf Wiedersehen."

He was gone, leaving poor Hedwig robbed not only of his countenance, but of the strong moral support afforded to a shy person by an unshaken confidence in her personal appearance and get-up. Hardly had she had time to recover her vexation when the first visitor was announced, and proved to be no less a person than the Herr Intendant himself.

It was an honor, but one which Hedwig would willingly have dispensed with. His felicitations on her marriage were so very elaborate, and his reminiscences of their first meeting in the Lindenthal embarrassed her still more, recalling, as they did, the beginning of all her trouble and disappointment. How she wished, poor little soul, that she were in the schoolhouse parlor at Lindendorf, receiving her old neighbors, and displaying her new splendors to their admiring and envious eyes; they made no impression on this patronizing, grand gentleman, whose civilities frightened her. Frau Pappelheim and her husband, being shown in soon after, discovered her edged quite away into a corner with flushed cheeks and hand nervously clasped in her lap, while the Herr Graf

sat leaning forward in his chair, making himself most agreeable according to his lights, in his usual *empresé* manner, with an engaging smile on his face, which did not, however, quite conceal a twinkle of amusement lurking in the corner of his eye.

Next appeared Armbrecht and Max Lortzing together, and soon the room grew nearly full, and seemed fuller from Hedwig's helpless inability to place her guests; she was quite incapable of any attempt to entertain them, and could do no more than answer the remarks they addressed to her in a nervous, absent manner. To her relief Graf von Wenzel presently took his leave, whereupon Frau Pappelheim's volubility flowed forth unchecked:

"My dear Frau Dahlmann, what a shame of that naughty husband of yours to desert you, and leave you to entertain us all by yourself! Oh, yes, I dare say,"—as Hedwig tried to put in an explanation,—“we know all about those convenient engagements, and how fond the gentlemen are of morning calls. Ah, my dear, when you have been married as long as I have you will be up to their tricks, and will know what a useful person the Herr Kapellmeister is when people want to get off their social duties.” She wagged her head knowingly. Then, with a rapid transition, catching sight of a magnificent bouquet on the table—“Ah, one of Miss Arrowsmith's trophies, I suppose. I dare say you will get plenty of those; she has more than she knows what to do with.”

“No,” said Hedwig, “Miss Arrowsmith sent me a few daffodils the day we came home; my husband brought me those roses.”

“Ah, indeed!” But Hedwig intercepted a glance of amusement exchanged between Frau Pappelheim and Fräulein Brenner which made her feel uncomfortable, she hardly knew why. The truth was, Clare had given the

flowers to Dahlmann for his wife, but he, warned by the late storm, had thought it wisest to say nothing of their origin.

"I wonder," pursued Frau Pappelheim meditatively, her head still running upon roses, "how much Miss Arrowsmith pays her florist for them."

"Pays?" said Hedwig, bewildered; "why, I thought they were given to her."

"Yes, my dear, of course: so does a confiding public. You have no idea how much prestige is to be gained by a few judicious bouquets. I don't know, I am sure, whether the Arrowsmith's are genuine or not, but I do know for an absolute fact that Rauch pays a man in the Furker Strasse so much a season to have them thrown to her. They don't cost so very much; they needn't be quite fresh, you know." Then, laughing at Hedwig's horrified face—"Ah, you may learn a good many pretty little secrets behind the scenes if you keep your eyes open."

The subject of bouquets was rather a delicate one to Sophie Brenner, so she hastened to change it. "Now, do tell me," she said, "in strict confidence, how do you like Miss Arrowsmith? She is such a great friend of your husband's. You need not mind saying what you think to us, for we hardly know her at all, any of us, do we, Minnie?"

"I don't know; I have not seen her yet," was Hedwig's reply.

Both ladies threw up their hands in surprise. "Never seen her," cried Frau Pappelheim shrilly; "why, I thought she had undertaken your whole *ménage*, chosen your furniture, engaged your cook! By the bye, how does the cook do? I took one from Countess Malaxa once, and, would you believe it, she expected fresh tea for the kitchen every day."

"Take care!" interposed her friend, with a glance at the door, and Hedwig, becoming aware that more visitors were entering, rose and received a small but very dignified-looking elderly lady with silver hair, followed by a tall, dark-haired girl, who might be plain, but certainly looked very imposing, enveloped in sealskin and sable. The name had been lost in the babel of voices, but she did not need it to tell her who the new arrivals were.

In a few moments she found herself extricated from the corner in which she had awkwardly got herself wedged, and seated on the sofa beside the little Countess, listening to the gentle voice in which she was expressing regret at having missed Frau Dahlmann's first visit, and explaining that some old friends from England, who were only in Blankenstadt for the day, had carried them off sight-seeing. But she must come again; her husband must bring her sometimes in the evenings, that they may get to know her.

Hedwig barely responded, and no word of thanks was forthcoming for the trouble the elder lady had taken to prepare her home for her; her attention was divided between the door which she had been watching the whole afternoon and Miss Arrowsmith, round whose chair in the window all the men had clustered—except Max Lortzing; he had departed with some abruptness.

Madame Malaxa made another attempt, but in the midst Dahlmann appeared in the doorway. He looked across at his wife with an encouraging smile, then his eye went round the room, and as he caught sight of Clare his face lighted up with a quick look of pleasure. He did not, however, join the group in the window, but made his way slowly through the room, receiving everyone's congratulations as he came with his usual quiet dignity, till he reached Hedwig and Madame Malaxa. He greeted the latter quite affectionately.

"My wife and I have been wanting to thank you for the trouble you took in making our rooms so pretty," he said.

The Countess could not quite resist a comical glance round at the changed aspect of things, and at Hedwig's flushed and embarrassed face, as she answered:

"Oh, we are only too delighted to have a finger in the pie! There is something very fascinating about a new home, especially a bridal one; and I think a place looks dreary if it is left entirely to servants to arrange. By the bye," she added, taking pity on Hedwig's manifest confusion, "I hope Gretel will turn out satisfactory. We found her a good girl in the main, only she wants a certain amount of looking after; she has no head."

"Thanks; I dare say she will do."

Ehrenfried fancied he detected a sulky tone in his wife's voice, and, fancying the two ladies might get on better without him, moved away to speak to Miss Arrow-smith. Clare looked up brightly as he approached. "What did the Kapellmeister want with you?" she asked.

The question was an innocent one enough, but something in the easy intimacy of the tone struck Hedwig. Her own awe of her big husband was rapidly diminishing, but she would never dare to catechise him so *sans façon*. His reply was in the same tone. "Nothing much. I will tell you another time," with a glance toward the Pappelheim group, who were on their feet trying to attract Hedwig's attention in order to take leave. But she was quite deaf to everything at her elbow, and had completely lost the thread of Madame Malaxa's discourse while her ears were straining to catch the few commonplace sentences that were being exchanged in the window. It was Clare whose quick senses caught the situation, and she moved across to Frau Dahlmann at once.

"My mother has absorbed you so completely, meine Frau, that I have scarcely been able to come near you. I hope we shall see a great deal of you. Herr Dahlmann must bring you to see us on our off nights. We give no parties in the opera season, but we like to see our friends in a quiet way, if it is not too dull."

"Thank you," murmured Hedwig; "I am not used to going out much."

In one shy glance she noticed the set of the close velvet toque on the crisp dark hair, the brilliance of the eyes, the hatchety features, the grace of every movement. Not pretty; oh, no! but how was it that this woman was so plain and so—what was it? Hedwig knew no word to describe the effect of Clare's personality.

"You are coming to-night, of course, to hear Herr Dahlmann in Tannhäuser?"

He shook his head and answered for her. "I think not. She does not care for it, and I should have to leave her alone."

"Oh, but my mother would chaperon her."

"Of course I would, with the greatest pleasure. Won't you come with me, Frau Dahlmann, and we will criticise our belongings from the stage box? You really ought to see your husband in one of his finest parts."

But Hedwig declined firmly and a little curtly. She had no wish to see her Ehrenfried masquerading as another woman's lover.

Mother and daughter looked at each other when they were in their little victoria driving home. "Poor Herr Dahlmann!" said the Countess.

"Oh, I wouldn't waste any pity on him. I have no doubt he is perfectly satisfied. She is really extremely pretty, in spite of the violent blue frock and the tortoiseshell pins. I dare say she looks charming when she isn't bedizened."

"Perhaps. If she had been a simple little country girl I could have taken to her, but she is an impossible young woman. He has so much refinement of feeling and manner, it must surely jar upon him."

"Oh, I don't know! Men are not so sensitive about those things. I dare say she is a good little soul in spite of bad manners, and she is evidently devoted to him."

"Evidently, and I suppose that will content him. She is wrapped up in him: it was hard enough to talk to her before, but after he came into the room she simply never listened to a word I said."

"I believe, mother, you were rather prejudiced by seeing all our pretty little arrangements overthrown. Evidently our tastes don't quite harmonize." And Clare laughed a little at the contrast between what was and what had been. She herself was too large-minded to be offended, but her mother was somewhat nettled, and remarked with some asperity:

"At any rate, it would have been becoming to have expressed a little gratitude for the pains we had taken. He thanked me, and she sat by scowling."

"I dare say to her it was all 'those queer foreign ways.' We must forgive her, and I don't think we will quite give her up; it would be a pity if she fell into the clutches of the Pappelheim set."

Clare's mind was not quite easy about those few words she had spoken to him before he went away on the subject of broken engagements. What had happened would most likely have happened all the same without her intervention, yet that brief conversation had seemed to have a strange significance. If she had helped to hurry him into a blunder, she might surely help him to make the best of it. That evening Graf von Wenzel came up to her between the parts, and, with a comical glance toward

Ehrenfried, whispered, "Wild roses do not bear transplantation, I see."

She looked puzzled, not quite catching his drift.

"I called to pay my respects to the bride this afternoon," he continued, "and I feel less inclined to forgive Dahlmann for his neglect of his work. The excuse is not such a fair one as I thought."

"Herr Graf, you are censorious. I thought Frau Dahlmann so very pretty. I believe she must have snubbed you."

The Intendant laughed in a subdued, silent way he had. "Talk of a lamb snubbing a wolf!" he said. "She looked at me as if she regarded me as a very dangerous wolf indeed. I am not sure I was not flattered." And he went away chuckling to himself.

XVI.

"WELL, Clare, don't you want to hear about my visit?"

Madame Malaxa drew a chair to the inviting open hearth, and unfastened her fur cloak. It was cold and raw outside, for it was February. More than a year had passed since the Dahlmann marriage, and she had just returned from a visit of congratulation on a certain auspicious occasion. Clare looked up from the *Revue de Deux Mondes* which she was deep in, and asked, "Was Frau Dahlmann more gracious than usual?"

"She seemed too happy to be anything else. Do you know, she really is very much improved. She looked so pretty, wrapped in a soft white shawl, adoring the baby, I had a good mind to kiss her."

"I wouldn't if I were you; she is like a kitten; she would scratch."

"Perhaps. Well, it was really a very pretty domestic scene. There was a kind of mother-in-law or elderly relation of some kind in command, who fussed over her a great deal, and while I was there Herr Dahlmann came in. He seems very proud of both wife and boy."

"Is it a nice baby?" said Clare, beginning to return to "De Vogue" before she heard the answer.

"Very nice: a fine boy for four weeks, very red and fluffy. He was handed round on a frilled pillow like sweatmeats on a salver. You can't really see anything of a baby done up German fashion. That reminds me: wonderful cakes and candies were served. I am sure I hope I did the right thing and expressed the correct sentiments. I don't suppose we shall be invited to the christening."

"Oh, no! we seem to have lost touch with Herr Dahlmann. She never took to us. By the way, I wonder if the Giorgione man is coming. I should like to see him."

"Who do you mean?"

"Don't you remember? His friend he told us such a tragic story of; the man he said that picture reminded him so much of."

"I fancy not; I know he said Herr Armbrecht was to stand proxy for somebody. I quite expect that terrible Plappenmaul will be godmother; she came rushing in while I was there, so I came away. She is on the footing of 'dearest Minnie.'"

"I wonder Herr Dahlmann lets his wife be so intimate with her; he always objected to her so strongly, and Herr Pappelheim did him some bad turns when he first came."

"Lets! My dear, he is henpecked. Big men are always afraid of little women."

It was true; Ehrenfried was henpecked. "Withy is weak and binds many woods." In marriage the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong; and when a conflict of wills arises, it is not always the weakest who goes to the wall. He was a man of strong will, accustomed to be obeyed; she a meek creature whom a hasty gesture would frighten and a harsh word reduce to tears; nevertheless it was she who got the whip-hand. How could he in selfish strength trample over such timid and soft opposition? He had the usual ideas of the German husband on marital authority and wifely submission, and had Hedwig sought to compass her wishes by loud-voiced wrangling or bold self-assertion she would have found herself firmly put down. He had little experience of the "emancipirte Frau," who is but just beginning to raise her head in Blachsen, but he would have known

better how to deal with her than with Hedwig's plaintiveness. He was so afraid of being harsh, of making his wife unhappy, after taking her from a cheerful home where she was petted and spoilt, to one which was of necessity lonely, that sooner than see her cry he yielded point after point, and Hedwig remained mistress of the situation.

On two matters he was resolved to be very firm: the acquaintance with Frau Pappelheim should not go beyond its elementary stage, and the inexperience of his little country-bred wife should be sheltered under the wing of Madame Malaxa. It need hardly be said that on both he was utterly worsted. He explained his wish on the first head to his wife, and was astonished a week or two later to find that a bosom friendship had grown up like a gourd; Christian names were exchanged, Hedwig went to Frau Pappelheim's kaffee-klatsch every week, ran to her with every domestic difficulty she got involved in, borrowed her things, copied her clothes, and repeated to her every morsel of theater gossip she could get hold of.

He was dismayed; he did want to keep his wife's country innocence untainted by the gossip and scandal of the town; he never thought she would have found any attraction in it, and for once he spoke out his annoyance pretty plainly. But Hedwig could not see the objectionableness; Frau Pappelheim was good-natured and friendly—and meddling; her talk seemed knowing and amusing, her air fashionable to the little country mouse; she felt more at ease with her than with any other of her new acquaintance; the town seemed lonely with its multitude of new faces, and, moreover, Hedwig had never been used to stand alone; she felt helpless without advice; it did seem cruel, as she said, to deprive her of her only friend, so when she plaintively asked what she was to say to poor dear Minnie, Ehrenfried gave in with a serious warning against letting any of his affairs come to Pappel-

heim's ears, and a resolve that his own lips must be sealed at home as to theater matters.

As to that other desire of his, he ruined that himself from the first by his masculine indiscretion. Possibly if he had let things quite alone, the elder woman's kindness and charm might have won upon Hedwig and overcome the prejudice with which she regarded "those odious foreigners" who had been the cause of her first quarrel with her husband. With Miss Arrowsmith she always felt herself at a disadvantage; beside her grace and distinction she shrank back, feeling awkward, tongue-tied, and ill-dressed; but the mother had so much tact and gentleness that if Ehrenfried had not constantly extolled her household management, and urged his wife to take hints therefrom, she might unconsciously have imbibed some favorable influence; but his praises set her into an attitude of conscious antagonism. You may lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink; still less can you cause to spring up a friendship between two antagonistic natures by bringing them into contact. A young wife does not often take very kindly to her husband's former friends; to do so argues an unusual largeness of mind, and poor little Hedwig was rather narrow and prejudiced to begin with. She went at first to spend evenings at the Finkenwiese when her husband wished it, and sat stiffly, ill at ease in the foreign surroundings, listening to the talk on all manner of to her incomprehensible subjects that went on between him and Miss Arrowsmith, while Madame Malaxa vainly tried to draw her out. To do Clare justice, it was not her fault; in the beginning she had laid herself out to please and entertain Frau Dahlmann; she was bent on making friends with her; but it was useless, and she and the tenor had so much in common they not unnaturally dropped into talk that interested them both.

Ehrenfried had a good deal of perseverance, he might have persisted in his hopeless experiment for a long while; but one day it came round to him that a garbled version of one of their discussions had found its way into the *Tägliche Lauscher*, by what route it was easy to guess. He gave in; the evening visits ceased rather abruptly with a lame apology from him, and Countess Malaxa and her daughter smiled at one another, and said of course honeymoon couples wanted no outside society, it was quite as it should be.

He was probably quite unconscious of living under a small tyranny; certainly Hedwig was unaware of exercising any. She intended to be the best of wives, she was devotedly fond of him; only her way of showing affection was lavishing caresses upon its object, it never occurred to her to postpone her wishes to his. For instance, she was an incurable dawdle, and her husband, coming in tired from a long hard morning at rehearsal, would find he had to wait an hour or so before the unpunctual dinner made its appearance. Being a patient soul, he would sit down and light a pipe to allay the pangs of hunger. At last, however, he remonstrated, but was met by such piteous complaints of Gretel's tiresomeness and the overwhelming difficulties of housekeeping in the town as compared with the country, that he thought himself greedy and tyrannical, and acquiesced. That an early hour or two had been wasted in a gossip with Frau Pappelheim till it was too late for the orders to the butcher to be carried out in time, was not mentioned. "Dear Minnie" always called in on her way from market, and of course Hedwig must talk to her whether her own affairs had been attended to or not.

He discovered in himself about this time a tendency to think more of creature comforts than he used to do. It was distinctly a disappointment to find how very poor a

housekeeper his pretty Hedwig made. He had imagined that a girl of the Frau Mühlerinn's bringing up would be a past-mistress in the domestic arts. Whenever he had seen Hedwig, she seemed to be busy about some household affairs, but he forgot that the good woman was far too managing ever to delegate any of her authority to her subordinates. Hedwig could do what she was bid under her aunt's eye: it is quite another matter to govern her own household, and Gretel was small help to her; she too could go in harness; between the shafts of Madame Malaxa's well-ordered *ménage* she went well enough, but she wanted directing, and directing was just what Hedwig's inexperience was not competent to give. So they muddled on, learning little or nothing from their blunders, and Ehrenfried marveled at the sour milk soup and tough potato cakes he waited so long for, and tried to make allowance for his wife's youthfulness.

He had made the not uncommon blunder of supposing that because a woman is stupid she is necessarily domestic; that if she was dense with her sums and impervious to history lessons, she would be the cleverer in ordering supplies or darning his socks, and he had to learn with some disappointment that the same limpness and inertia of mind that prevented her mastering her schoolwork hindered her taking any effective grip of her affairs. Little as he loved the Frau Tante, it was quite a relief when she took the reins of government while Hedwig was laid up.

Nevertheless, they got on very harmoniously. He was good-humoredly tolerant of his wife's failures, and chivalrously tender of her during the weeks of ill-health and depression that preceded the arrival of the boy, and Hedwig could afford to be amiable, for she had won all along the line. Especially, she triumphed in that she had succeeded entirely in cutting off his friendship with Miss Arrowsmith. When Gretel, who was allowed to gossip

unchecked, enlarged on affairs at the Finkenwiese, and told her mistress how often the gnädige Herr had spent the evenings there in his bachelor days, Hedwig smiled to herself, and thought how easily she had put a stop to that, for all her fears beforehand. That Ehrenfried missed his friends never once struck her.

It made a great difference to him, more than he would have believed possible. He met Miss Arrowsmith, of course, almost daily at the opera, but their intercourse was on a plane distinctly less friendly. It was not that she at all resented the rather ungrateful abruptness with which his habitual visits had been broken off, but she was annoyed with him for a slight but perceptible falling off in the quality of his acting; it showed a tendency to relapse into the painstaking, but rather lifeless renderings of his early attempts. He sang as beautifully as ever, but to her mind there was a want, and it vexed her because it necessarily affected her own impersonations. There was nothing definite to find fault with; if there had been, she would have found means to get rid of him as she had of his predecessors, but there was a certain heaviness that reacted upon her, and the absence of discussions and private practices between themselves prevented their attaining that marvelous harmony of effect that used to redouble the powers of both.

She was a little disappointed in him. It was natural, she supposed, that he should be wrapped up in his pretty wife to the detriment of his work, but from the point of view of Art it was deplorable, and she had hardly expected it of him. She had thought his scarcely a nature to be wholly satisfied with the shallow and second-rate little person he had chosen. Perhaps by and by he would turn to his work again with renewed devotion, but at present it certainly suffered, and she was provoked with him for seeming to settle down into a contented mediocrity.

She knew she was inconsistent. When she had thought him inclined to swerve from his *fiancé*, she had pointed rigorously to the path of duty, and now he was following that path with apparently entire satisfaction she was displeased with him. Her manner grew short and cold, and chilled him still further. For a long time he had taken great pleasure in his work, and found in it a refuge from the dullness that was creeping over him like blue mold: now that too was growing a toilsome, uphill task.

XVII.

HEDWIG belonged to the order of women for whom the baby is the center of the universe, the pivot on which her life revolves. In a day when it has become the fashion for women to neglect, and to pretend, at any rate, that they do not care for their children, she was a shining example ; but even virtue may be pushed too far. The affairs of the nursery completely filled her horizon to the exclusion of all other interests, and even her beloved Friedel sank into utter insignificance beside the new autocrat. Master Anton's infant disorders, preferences, and peculiarities were her sole topic of conversation, and that Ehrenfried should fail to take an equal interest in them was but an instance of the obtuse selfishness of the sterner sex.

Day after day she would let her husband come in from his work to find her mind, if not her arms, wholly occupied by the little tyrant, who, not content with reigning in his proper domain, made himself felt and heard in every room in the house. Dahlmann was proud of his son, but found that in the present early stage of his career a little of his company went a long way. He bore with the dislocation of the household very good-humoredly; but when it came to his practicing time being invaded by howls in quite a different key, because Hedwig chose to walk her refractory son up and down through the length of salon and dining room, alleging that the nursery was not so cool, he was obliged to protest with some decision.

Hedwig had never been much of a companion to him, still he had enjoyed taking her to hear the band in the

Thiergarten, or to see some of the sights of the beautiful old city on his leisure afternoons, but now she would go nowhere; the baby was entertainment enough for her, and she was surprised his father should not share her opinion. It would have been better if Ehrenfried had cared more and asserted his own claims; but he was only too glad she should have something to occupy her solitary hours, and did not grudge those when he might have been with her. He had always loved solitude, and went off willingly enough for long country rambles in the lengthening days. Truth to tell, it was something of a relief that she should have a new object on which to expend a little of her effusiveness. He was an undemonstrative man; his feelings were not prone to seek expression in fond words and caresses, but they were the only coin that passed current with Hedwig, and it had been something of a tax to respond in full to her demands. Matters went in many respects more smoothly for the change, now that she was too busy to be always pulling up her happiness by the roots to see whether it was growing, as she had had a habit of doing.

The friendliness of Max Lortzing's demeanor, which had suffered a temporary eclipse, had been quite restored after Dahlmann's marriage, but there had never been much intimacy, so the latter was a little surprised by Max joining him one Friday after rehearsal on his homeward way, and taking his arm in quite a confidential manner.

"I want you to do me a good turn if you will," he began in an insinuating tone. "You know Miss Arrow-smith has more influence with the Intendant than anybody, and I want to get her to use it on behalf of—of a friend of mine."

"Well?"

"It is Mademoiselle Natalie Scharwenka," pursued

Max rather hesitatingly; "she has been dancing for a week 'als Gast'; and she wants very much to get the permanent appointment as first dancer, and—well, of course it is no business of mine, but the fact is I am very anxious she should succeed, and I thought if Miss Arrowsmith could be induced to speak for her—— You see, the other candidates are none of them so good, but they have all got interest with somebody; but if she had Miss Arrowsmith on her side she might snap her fingers at Frau Rauch's candidate, or Pauli's, or anybody's. Why, if the Intendant was obdurate, Miss Arrowsmith could drop a word to the King. She would work it somehow, don't you see?"

"Yes; but I don't see where I come in."

"Why, I thought you would talk her over; she is so unapproachable lately. You wouldn't mind? You surely think Nata—I mean Mademoiselle Scharwenka deserves it?"

"Oh, as far as my own opinions go, I certainly preferred her to any of her competitors; but I can see you have a strong personal interest in the matter. Why on earth don't you speak to Miss Arrowsmith yourself, and plead your own cause? She would be a great deal more likely to listen to you."

Max looked a little confused. "Oh, I couldn't possibly. Don't you understand?"

"I understand that you have very wisely ceased to cry for the moon; but you don't suppose the moon cares?"

Max flushed up to the roots of his curly hair. "No, of course not; still I don't imagine any woman likes one to console one's self too quickly. I certainly did make a great fool of myself last winter. Upon my word, I haven't the face to go to her showing such an interest in another woman. Besides, I haven't exactly the right to put myself forward on Natalie's behalf; she mightn't

like it: we are not engaged or anything yet. If you don't see your way to help me, it is of no consequence. I am sorry I asked you."

"Now stop a bit," said Dahlmann, stretching out a detaining hand as the other dropped his arm and turned away. "I did not say I would not; I only wanted to understand all about it. I have no objection to try, only you must not blame me if you find I have less influence with Miss Arrowsmith than you thought. I don't suppose I shall see her before Sunday," he added, looking back as he turned down the Furker Strasse.

"Oh, but you must!" called Max after him. "It will probably be decided to-morrow."

In consequence of this exhortation Ehrenfried opened the nursery door that evening, and put his head in just as his son was being tubbed. "Wife, I am going to call at Madame Malaxa's this evening; I have to see Miss Arrowsmith on a little matter of business. You would not like to come?"

"Shut the door!" screamed Hedwig; "the baby is in a draught. No, of course not. Do I ever go out and leave my treasure?"

"He'll be asleep in no time, and then you will be alone. Surely his nurse could take care of him for an hour. I thought as you had not been to see them for so long, it would be civil; but it does not signify."

In fact, it was distinctly better as it was. It would hardly have done to confide poor Max's desires to Miss Arrowsmith within earshot of Hedwig, at the risk of seeing them served up as a comical story in the next issue of the *Tägliche Lauscher*.

It was with diffidence that Dahlmann climbed the once familiar stairs. How long it was since he had mounted them, and how ungrateful he must have seemed for past kindness! There was no consciousness of any such thing,

however, in the warmth of the Countess' welcome. The familiar charm of the room greeted his senses like a homecoming, with its brightness of firelight and fragrance of flowers. The two ladies were alone as usual, Madame Malaxa busy with her embroidery, a heap of gay silks and gold thread in her lap, Clare curled up on the hearthrug with a small collection of books and dictionaries round her. Evidently she had kept up her old pursuits, whatever he had done. She rose to her feet and gave him a greeting hardly less kind than her mother's.

Due inquiries were made for Frau Dahlmann and the newcomer.

"Oh, he thrives apace," said Ehrenfried; "but he is developing into a terrible little tyrant; he won't let his mother leave him for half an hour. She begged me to make her apologies that your kind visit had never been returned."

"Oh, I quite understand that," smiled Madame Malaxa, "with number one. By the time she has filled her nursery with half a dozen or so, she will find she has a great deal more leisure."

"Half a dozen! Heaven forbid! if they are all to be gifted with the power of lung of this young gentleman." Then he drew a chair to Clare's side. "I am interrupting you; you were busy when I came in."

"Busy idleness. I was trying impossible feats." She gathered her books together, and as he stooped to pick up a slim one that had fallen to the ground, "You will laugh, but I was actually attempting to render one of Heine's lyrics into English."

He held out his hand. "Mayn't I see?"

"If it were anyone else I should say certainly not; but with your knowledge of English you may help me."

He shook his head. "Alas, my English! where is it?"

"Où sont les neiges d'antan?" I think it must have

gone with the snows of yester-year. But you don't mean to say you have forgotten it?"

"Almost, I am afraid; on the surface, at any rate. I dare say if I dug a little I should find it again. And we never finished 'Sigurd.'"

"No; and there at the page we left off is the note you made in blue pencil at the foot of the 'Brynhild' canto, about Baldur and all the myths concerning him, as a standing reproach to your idleness."

As she spoke the whole scene of that evening came vividly back to him. He could even see the nibbled end of pencil in his fingers while he made the note, Clare sitting close beside him in her red gown. It was on that same evening that he had sung "Adelaide" to her with all his soul in his voice. And then he had said those foolish things about betrothal which had made her angry. They had grown almost strangers since then. He sat silent a minute; then he began eagerly, "Indeed, it was not idleness or indifference——" But she cut his defense short; that were better let alone.

"Oh, no, of course! but other things interfered; they always will. It is shocking the number of pursuits one takes up and lets drop because something else crowds them out. But now would you really care to see the Heine attempt? All the translations I know seem to me so woefully inadequate, but I am still more disgusted with my own."

He took the scribbled note sheet, and ran it through to-himself in an undertone, then looked up at her. "It won't do, you know; not that I could better it. The words are all right; you have caught the sense exactly, but the essence—that has evaporated somehow. It is the rhythm, I believe. There is nothing in English in verse, so far as I know, to answer to the delicate changeful fall of accent that makes his music."

"Exactly. I was conscious of it all along, but it baffles me. If only I could write in my step-father's tongue, as I ought to be able to, after living so long in Greece. I believe Greek is the one language Heine could be translated into. I suppose you don't know those lovely Island songs? They have just the falling cadence of the German. The ear can hardly detect any difference between 'Eis to reuma tis zoes mou' and its German equivalent. How I wish I could do the 'Armesünderblum' into Greek."

Time slipped away in endeavors to find a measure that would fit, and to adjust Clare's delicate phrases to the incisive force of the original, till supper was announced, a meal which the exigencies of theater hours demand instead of the customary late dinner of civilized humanity.

"Now, Herr Dahlmann, you must stay," said Madame Malaxa, rising. "I am sure Frau Dahlmann keeps early hours, and you will have missed your supper at home."

He consented, nothing loath, the more willingly as poor Max's commission had been completely shelved. He did not enter upon it till they were in the drawing room again, then he said to Clare, "I am ashamed to say I had an errand to you, which I ought to have unfolded at once, and I had nearly forgotten it. It was rather a delicate negotiation, and as I have little diplomacy I am bound to make a mull of it."

Clare laughed. "Well, out with it," she said; "you pique my curiosity, at any rate."

"You must know that young Lortzing has taken it into his foolish head to fall in love with the Polish young lady who was dancing here on trial last week."

He spoke apologetically. It did strike him with wonder that any man who had once raised his eyes to Miss Arrow-smith should be able to turn them elsewhere.

"I perceived as much," said Clare, a smile flickering

about the corners of her mouth. "Pray, did he ask you to break it to me gently?"

"No, no! he was not quite such a coxcomb. But he had the grace to be ashamed of himself. That was how it was he had not the face to come to you himself."

"He seems to have taken all the world into his confidence; but he had no right to think I used him badly."

"Of course; I am sure he would acknowledge that himself, now he has come to his senses."

"I am very glad he has come to his senses; but I don't see what he wants of me."

"That is my stupidity, presenting it wrong end foremost," said Dahlmann. "You know I told you I should make a mess of it. The gist of the matter is this: he wants to invoke your good offices on behalf of the young lady. You see, he trusts in your magnanimity, but he was too shamefaced to ask you himself."

"But what does he want me to do for her?"

"Why, we all know you have great influence at headquarters, and if you could use it to get her appointed Max would be eternally grateful."

Clare looked thoughtful. "What is your opinion?" she said.

"Well, I thought very highly of her powers. I have seldom seen better dancing. Her feet seemed to touch the ground hardly more than the breast of a skimming swallow touches the water. There is something almost poetic in her movements."

"She makes you quite poetic in description; but I quite agree with you. I admired her immensely; the twinkling of her little feet in that last *pas seul* in 'Die Stumme von Portici' put me in mind of a scherzo played by a master hand on the violin. So far as dancing goes I think she is pretty safe. But that was not what I meant. Will she do for Max?"

"You are a better judge of that than I am. From what I saw of her I should say she was a nice, simple, modest girl and well brought up, but Armbrecht can tell you more about her than I can; he knows something of her people."

"Find out from him for me, will you? I can talk to you about it better than I could to him. It seems rather foolish, but I have a certain feeling of responsibility. I have always taken an interest in Max's well-doing; he is a dear good fellow at heart in spite of his outside foolishness, and I should not like him to get drawn in with the ordinary type of dancing girl."

"I don't think she is that, and perhaps a warm attachment might steady him."

"I hope it might. I have been rather unhappy about him lately; I was afraid he was beginning to go downhill. I can't think it was my fault; but I do think he made me an excuse to himself. I wanted to talk to you about him, only we never see you now."

"He hasn't been quite so steady lately, but this may keep him straight."

"If he is in earnest. You think he is?"

"I can't tell. Whether he has known anything of her before, or whether this is a sudden flame, kindled in a week, is more than I can say. I will find out more about the whole business and let you know. Can you keep the Herr Graf's decision over for a day or two, think you?"

"I fancy I can. He rather leans to that Hungarian girl who came first, but I did not like her. I don't say I can absolutely fix his choice, but he did consult me, so perhaps he will listen. And now I suppose it will be a 'blue moon' before we see you again in private life."

Whatever lengthy period that expression may be supposed to denote, nothing of the sort elapsed before Dahlmann found his way to the Finkenwiese again. It was a

great pleasure to him to be there once more, and Max's commission drew him and Miss Arrowsmith insensibly into the friendly terms they had been on before his marriage. To be allowed to pick up the old friendship again just where it had dropped, without explanation or apology, was a relief; that he could not have given without some reflection on his wife's ungraciousness. It was wonderful how quickly the broken strands reunited, and how soon he slipped into the easy, happy intimacy of former days. Intercourse with Clare brightened and rubbed up his powers, as it had always done. That slight heaviness which will oftentimes dim the achievements of the most gifted singers when habit has blunted the keen edge of sensibility, and inspiration lacks renewal, melted like mists before the sun, for Clare's ever-fresh zest communicated itself to her colleague, and he grew more popular than ever, and infinitely more contented. He never neglected home claims, but if Hedwig preferred running off to Frau Pappelheim to going with him to the Finkenwiese, where she was frequently invited, that seemed to him no reason that he should stay away.

The occasional comments that were made, such as that "Now Miss Arrowsmith had let young Lortzing slip through her fingers, she must try and tempt Herr Dahlmann away from his poor little wife," and that "Some girls must always have a man dangling at their heels, even a married one," never reached him, or, if they had, would not have troubled his serenity nor hers.

XVIII.

WE grumbling Britons need not, after all, arrogate to ourselves a monopoly of all the detestable weather: Blankenstadt in a thaw might really give points to London. There is so much more snow and ice to be disposed of, and then the wind that sweeps down from the mountains is so unspeakably bitter. It had been altogether a depressing winter, cold enough to inflict quite as much bronchitis and rheumatism as ever an English winter has upon its shoulders, and too changeable for the compensating joys of skating and sleighing.

Hedwig shivered as she stood listlessly looking out of the window. Her husband had just departed for rehearsal in a droschky, which she thought extravagant; but when a throat represents stock in trade it is not be exposed to risks by wet feet. How dull it looked! The morning had begun with snow, but now it had turned to sleet, melting as it fell, and running tearfully down the window pane. Just a day to make one thankful not to be obliged to go out and to enhance the comforts of a cozy interior, but the room to which Hedwig turned back neither looked snug nor felt warm. The door of the stove had been carelessly left open and it had got chilled, and the room was pervaded by a vague disorder which would have made most women set it vigorously to rights before they sat down. Not so Hedwig; she did not care though the children's toys were left lying on the sofa, and a soiled little pinafore was on the table among the books and photographs. She matched the room only too well; she had gone off in the few years of her

marriage in a way a girl of three-and-twenty has no right to do. Her complexion was dim and muddled with much sitting over the stove, and her figure was a thing of the past. To be sure, no woman looks to advantage at eleven o'clock in the morning, without stays, in a loose jacket and tumbled skirt, showing evident traces of the children's destructive little hands, with her hair in the same limp, ruffled knot she had slept in, lacking all its silky gloss. But to Hedwig's ideas it would be quite time enough if she got dressed by the two o'clock dinner, so she just pushed some loose strands behind her ears and sat down in a low chair.

Her knitting, of course, was in her hand, but after a few rows she found she had missed a narrowing; she pulled out her needles and began to unravel, but before she picked up the stiches again she caught sight of a novel left on the sideboard overnight, and taking it up was soon lost to mundane worries and dropped stitches. While one knits one can think, and Hedwig did not want to think; and as for dreaming, she preferred to have it done for her. To build castles in the air one must have some hope of one day living in them, and poor Hedwig had lost heart and hope. She considered herself a very unhappy woman, but it would have been hard to say what right she had to think so. Her husband was invariably kind and considerate, very gentle and wonderfully patient of her muddling, uncomfortable ways; but she told herself with tears that it was not his kindness she wanted. She felt she had only the outer husk of what her soul was clamoring for. He had not deceived her; she knew, she had known from the first, that the inmost citadel of his heart had never been hers. Perhaps she might have won it by her dependence on him, by her clinging affectionateness in early days; but it was little likely that querulous reproaches would do so now.

Love, unsatisfied love especially, is a potent factor in forming a woman's character. Sometimes, in a strong soul, it works like a refiner's fire; more often the affection which gave so lavishly at first begins to exact a return for its outlay, to weigh and measure jealously what it gets with what it gives. A man's heart will not be bargained for so; in truth, he more often gives his best to her who lightly regards it. At any rate, love was never won by upbraidings. Then follows a morbid, self-regarding temper, prone to take offense at every fancied slight, and the whole nature sours.

Solitude fostered this unwholesome state of mind in Hedwig. She was much more alone than was good for her, for, unluckily, she detested the opera and all connected with it, and seldom or never went to a performance. Her familiarity with the Pappelheims had a little rubbed off the religious disapproval with which she had at first regarded it; but it was still a hated rival that took her husband from her. As to sharing his interests and caring for it because it was his work, that never once occurred to her. She had always felt that if he had truly loved her he would have given it up at her bidding, but that she should give up her prejudice for his sake was quite outside her imagination. He was more than ever wrapped up in it. As his wife's plaintive tendency developed into confirmed fretfulness, he instinctively sheltered himself by absorption in outside interests. He never thought of neglecting her; he only tried to avoid what was uncomfortable. He was seldom angry with her, even when her reproaches stung him; he just slipped away.

The morning wore on, but before "Gold Else" was finished came an interruption in the shape of Frau Pappelheim, enveloped in waterproof and galoches.

"How moped you look, Schatz," she cried; "I knew

you would be, so I paddled round. I can't stick in the stove corner myself, be the weather what it will; I must have a little diversion. Now I have had to retire from the opera, and the chicks are all at school, I should die of the blues." She sat down and drew from her pocket a ball of wool and the clicketing needles, without the accompaniment of which even her tongue would hardly have wagged so glibly.

"I am sure I am nearly dead of the blues already," said Hedwig, picking up her yarn and regarding the raveled mess her stocking had got into with a hopeless eye. "Whether it is the weather or the bad night I had with the baby, or Erhenfried being so cross with her for disturbing him, I feel this morning as if life was not worth the trouble of living."

"Oh, my dear, you shouldn't take things to heart so. Men are always disagreeable if their rest is broken; they never think what we have to go through. When my children were small, Fritz made himself so odious that I gave in and let the nurse have them at night. It is really much better; one gets altogether fagged out with them."

"My nurse is having a holiday, so I must take baby myself till she comes back. Lina has got her now for a little. I felt I must have a few minutes' peace and quietness."

"Teething, I suppose. You must let me see her presently."

"You shall when she wakes, but if she is quiet I wouldn't disturb her for a kingdom. She must be getting some back teeth, I think. It is such a pity—she was getting on so nicely and growing so playful, and now she does nothing but scream."

"And now, my dear, do tell me: what is this business about Merlin? Is it true? Have your husband and Miss Arrowsmith really struck?"

"I should have thought you knew," said Hedwig bitterly, "that I am the last person to know what goes on in the opera house. If you want to know any of my husband's affairs you had better ask Miss Arrowsmith."

"Oh, my love, has it really come to that?" cried Frau Pappelheim."

Hedwig flushed up hotly, feeling that she had given herself away, and tried to retrieve her blunder.

"Oh, I only mean, you know, he is so secretive about what goes on in the company; I am quite out of it; and he has such a ridiculous opinion of Miss Arrowsmith's judgment and cleverness, and all the rest of it. Those ugly women must needs be clever, I suppose," she added with a silly laugh.

"Ugly? Well, I wouldn't trust too much to that if I were you, dear."

"What do you mean?" said Hedwig, looking uncomfortable, and going from red to white.

"Oh, well, you know now I don't go to the practices, of course I don't see much of what goes on; still——"

"Still what?"

"Why, of course Fritz talks, and I can't help hearing how the men laugh about it."

"Go on. What do they say?"

"Oh, nothing much; it is all quite platonic, of course. Miss Arrowsmith is always strictly chaperoned by the Frau Mama. Still, I don't know that I should quite care to have my husband on those terms with another woman."

"He quite gave them up at one time," said Hedwig moodily; "but he resents my being so taken up with the dear children, and they are always asking him there."

"Yes, that is how it is, one can see. Men are all alike, they are like wax in the hands of an unscrupulous woman. Of course you did not know anything about it,

but before you married it was quite plain to see that Miss Arrowsmith had made up her mind to have Herr Dahlmann, and make him throw you over. She was so angry when she lost him, that for months she would hardly speak to him. It was the more noticeable because before they were always whispering together at the practices. Oh, I have often watched them. Then after a bit, you see, when Max Lortzing had slipped through her fingers, she must needs have some man to dangle after her, so she thought she would show her power over your husband. There may be no harm in it, I dare say there isn't—ah, there comes the little cherub."

For at this moment Gretel's successor appeared with a very wan and fretful cherub in her arms. "If you please, m'm, would you take the baby. The man has never sent the beer, so I suppose I had better go for it."

"Yes, I suppose you must. Give her to me. How does she seem now?"

"She has been going on like that the whole morning, m'm. I couldn't get her to sleep, do what I would."

"Let me look at her," said Frau Pappelheim. "I am knowing, you see, having brought up half a dozen. I can see what it is; the poor little darling has got a gathering in her ear. I should put a hot onion in, as hot as she can bear it; that would relieve it directly. I always did that to mine. You can see what it is by the way she keeps putting her head on one side. I must fly. I hear your husband coming up, and he hates me like poison. I don't know whether he thinks I make you waste your time, or corrupt your innocent mind. There, good-by, love——" with a pecking kiss. "Now, don't fret about baby or anything else."

A minute later he came in, unwinding a long comforter from his throat. "It is a beastly day out," he said; "you have the best of it by the fireside."

His eye fell on the table, where was no sign of preparation, but Hedwig was on the defensive before he uttered a word. "It is no use your grumbling at me because the dinner isn't ready. I have had the poor baby ill and fretting the whole morning; of course I have had no time to get dressed or anything." She was pacing up and down the room as she spoke with the wailing child in her arms, feeling weary in every limb, and with a sense of angry irritation at its cries that made her long to shake it. She was usually the tenderest of mothers, but at this moment every nerve was ajar. It was one thing to indulge in her own mind in a wordless suspicion of her husband, and quite a different matter to hear her suspicion put into shape in the mouth of another. She had intended to meet him with the patient dignity of an injured wife; but she was too distracted with the noise to think collectedly, and fretfulness got the upper hand.

He, too, looked a little worried and out of humor. Matters had not gone smoothly at rehearsal; everyone was more or less hoarse and sang badly, and the weather seemed to have put all tempers out of tune as well as voices. "Really," he said, drawing his brows together, "I can't have the whole house turned into a nursery. Do ring for someone to take the baby."

"There is no one to ring for. You know as well as I do that the nurse is gone for a holiday, and I had to send Lina out because that stupid man forgot to send the beer. You always seem to think that the children can be put away in a cupboard like dolls when you are tired of playing with them."

He looked at her, and saw that she was flushed, nervous, and overdone. "There, never mind," he said gently; "I did not mean to be cross to you, poor little woman. I forgot about the nurse. I will take her for a bit as soon as I have got off my damp overcoat. Well,

little miss, what do you mean by kicking up such an infernal row, eh?" as he lifted the little white bundle tenderly and laid her against his broad shoulder. She looked like a wee soft windflower on a rock. The children were usually very good with him; they liked the comfortable strength of his arms; but to-day he tried dandling and whistling, his chain and seals, even his watch, all the distractions appropriate to infancy alike in vain; the piteous wail went on. Presently he carried her to her mother's room, where Hedwig was struggling to do up her hair in a hurry.

"I think this child is very ill," he said; "how strange she looks! I wish you would come and have a look at her."

"I know she is ill," returned Hedwig; "she has been ailing for days, though I don't suppose you have noticed it. She is getting her back teeth through, poor little mite."

"Hadn't you better let the doctor see her?"

"He has given up his practice and gone away."

"Schmidt has, I know, but there are other doctors in Blankenstadt, I suppose. Why, you might as well give up eating meat because your butcher has sold his business. I will run round after dinner and ask his successor to come; Madame Malaxa has had him, I know, and likes him."

That name was quite enough for Hedwig. "You will do nothing of the kind!" She snatched the baby out of his arms. "I should not think of trusting my children to a stranger, a young man, too. What should he know of babies? I understand perfectly what is the matter with her; she has a gathering in her ear, and I am going to put something on it directly."

At this moment another actor appeared upon the scene. The elder child had been discreetly taking a

siesta since he came in from the Kindergarten, but he had got impatient, and climbed out of his cot, and now trotted in barefoot, clamoring for his shoes and his dinner. His mother, greatly to his surprise, cut his babblings very short. She caught him by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

"Naughty boy!" she said, "to come making this noise and disturbing your poor little sister. Go back into the nursery this moment and wait till Lina comes to you."

Toni, who was quite unused to severity, set up a howl, and his father interfered.

"My dear girl," he said, "don't be so rough to the poor little chap. He isn't old enough to understand that baby is ill, and I am sure if he is half as hungry as I am his impatience is excusable. Come along, Toni, we will see if daddy can't lay the cloth for once. I verily believe that girl must have bolted."

"It is a most extraordinary thing," said Hedwig, turning a flushed and angry countenance upon her husband, "that you, who are always finding the poor children in the way, should suddenly take to interfering in my management of them; but I don't choose to be set aside. Come into the nursery as I bid you, Toni. Lina will bring your dinner when she comes in, Ehrenfried; I shall have mine with the children."

XIX.

ABOUT the turn of the night, when the hand of sleep lies heaviest upon tired eyes, Ehrenfried felt himself wrenched away from the dream he was happily pursuing by a clutch upon his shoulder and an agitated voice in his ear. "Wake up! oh, do wake up! Baby is worse, and I don't know what to do."

He raised himself on his elbow. "Eh, what? Is anything the matter?" blinking drowsily, with his head just ready to sink back upon the pillow.

Hedwig uttered a despairing cry. "Oh, you are going to sleep again! How can you! I tell you she'll die if you don't fetch the doctor quick!"

He sprang out, and began to hurry on some clothes. "What is it?" he said. "I thought she was better; she is so quiet, she doesn't cry."

He went over to the bed where Hedwig had laid the child while she roused him, and bent over her. She was lying on her back, her little arms and hands not curled up as a baby's always are, but stretched stiffly out, and only her stertorous breathing showing that she lived.

"I dropped asleep when she left off crying," said poor Hedwig piteously; "I thought she must be easier, and then suddenly I woke in a fright, and she was like this. She doesn't know me."

"Who shall I fetch?" said Ehrenfried, struggling into his greatcoat, "Zornlinn?"

"Anyone; only, for Heaven's sake, be quick! Oh, if I only knew what to do!"

He hurried down, only pausing to wake the servant

and send her to her mistress; he could not bear to leave the poor terrified mother alone. Anything was better than to be left to that helpless, agonized watch without a soul to speak to; but Lina's tales of all the infant illnesses and deaths that had ever taken place among her family and friends were not very encouraging, and the time seemed endless before Hedwig heard the quick returning steps.

The doctor might be young, in spite of spectacles, but he seemed to know what he was about, and Hedwig breathed more freely as he took the baby from her arms and carried it to the light.

"Bring me a candle," he said, after a moment's keen scrutiny.

"Is the light not good enough?" said Hedwig, fluttering nervously round, "we can light the other burner."

"No, no; that's not what I want. Ah, that is it," as Ehrenfried put a taper into his hand. He held the flame close before the wide-open eyes. "How long has this child been ill?" His voice was soft, but it had a tone of asperity.

"She has been ailing several days," said Hedwig, "and since yesterday morning she has seemed to suffer terribly."

"Why didn't you send for me before? I might have done something to relieve her earlier."

"I thought it was only the earache," faltered the mother. "I fancied there must be a gathering in her ear, so I tried an onion, and then hot fomentations."

"Hot fomentations! Good Heavens! and she has inflammation of the brain. I am sure I don't know where we are to get ice at this time of night. Bring me the coldest water you can get. It is extraordinary," he muttered grimly, half to himself while it was being fetched, "how people will go on trying their own old

women's nostrums with a child whose little life may go out like the snuff of a candle; and then when it is too late send for us and expect us to work a miracle!"

"Too late! Oh, you don't mean it is too late!" Hedwig lifted her imploring eyes to his face, streaming with tears.

"I cannot tell," he said more gently. "I will do my very best, you may be sure of that; but it has taken such hold."

She broke into wild sobbing, and flung herself on her knees beside him, throwing over the cold water Lina had just brought.

The doctor frowned. "You had better take your mistress away," he said to the maid; "she can do no good. Why, where is your master?" looking round the room for a more efficient helper.

"He must have gone to bed again," wailed Hedwig. "Oh, how could he be so cruel!" She had brought the baby into the day nursery, fearful of waking the other child, who was asleep in his little crib in her room.

"Well, let the servant help me; she can do what I want." But at that moment Ehrenfried came softly in, looking very black and dirty, carrying some lumps of sooty snow in a wash-hand basin.

"Will this be any use?" he said. "It is the nearest approach to ice I can find. It is freezing again to-night, happily, so I went up on the roof and got this out of the gutter."

"I thought you must have gone after some ice, but I am glad you did not go far; every moment is precious."

"Does she suffer much?" Ehrenfried whispered presently, as he knelt in front of the doctor, holding the lumps of ice with tingling fingers against the soft and tender little head. "Doesn't this hurt her?"

"Not a bit; she is quite unconscious. If only I could

get her to swallow. Try if you can hold her head in that position for a moment; so. Now give me a spoon, quick!"

It was Lina who handed the spoon. Hedwig was too dazed to do anything, but sat on the floor rocking herself to and fro with her hands clasped round her knees.

After a minute Dr. Zornlinn laid down the spoon. "It is no good," he said; "I am afraid it isn't any use my staying now. There is nothing else to be done but keep changing the ice. I will look in again the first thing in the morning."

"Don't go," said Ehrenfried in the same low tone; "don't leave us while there is any hope."

"Well, I will stay if it is any comfort to you, though I am no more use now than you are yourself," said the doctor, casting a lingering thought to his bed. But he was used to setting aside his comfort for people to whom it seemed as if his presence or absence meant life or death. If he yawned a little wearily he might be forgiven. His watchfulness, at any rate, never relaxed.

The slow minutes went by. Nobody spoke, and there was no sound in the room but Hedwig's sobbing, which grew fainter as she got exhausted. Then the child shivered slightly and stretched out her little limbs. The two men exchanged a silent look, and the doctor rose and laid the little motionless body softly in the cradle. Hedwig roused herself and sprang up from the floor.

"What are you doing?" she cried; "why do you lay her down? Is she asleep? She must be better, I am sure; her breathing is not so loud."

Ehrenfried put his arm tenderly round his wife, and tried to draw her to him. "My poor darling, it is all over. We can do no more for her; she is gone."

She pushed him off almost fiercely, and flung herself down beside the cradle. He bent over her and would

have spoken again, but the doctor took him by the arm and drew him away. "Better leave her to herself for a little, and let her have her cry out. Her maid will look after her; the women understand one another. I am sorry," he added, as Dahlmann was lighting him downstairs, "that I spoke so severely about her nostrums. I am afraid I am too apt to indulge in a brutal frankness."

"I wish you had not; she will reproach herself so. You see, I wanted to fetch you this afternoon, and she thought she knew best, poor child. Do you think the delay was of such terrible consequence?"

The other grunted. "H'm; I can't say for certain. It may have made all the difference."

"It was my fault; she is so young and inexperienced. And it is a bitter price to pay for experience," he added with a sigh that choked a little.

"Don't think me an unfeeling brute," said the doctor, as he gripped his hand hard. "I am deeply sorry for you."

"I know. You have done your utmost for us. Thanks for staying so long."

"Don't imagine I grudge it. I would have given twenty nights' rest and welcome if I could have saved her; but we are a helpless set, after all. Well, good-night—or rather good-morning," as the heavy door swung back and showed the street in the pallid wintry dawn.

Ehrenfried stood still a minute or two after the muffled-up figure had disappeared. The bitter chill, the utter stillness, made it seem like a strange country—some street in dreamland, with the unearthly silvery light lying reflected in the half-frozen pools between the cobblestones. Then the Hausmann tapped him on the arm. He at least wanted to get back to his bed and finish his broken night's rest,

"So the little one is with the angels," he said, as he turned the big grating key in the lock.

Lina had got her mistress back to bed, he found when he went upstairs; and as Hedwig lay quiet, with her face to the wall, he would not disturb her. He completed his hasty dressing, and, lighting the stove, set to work writing those dreary notes to undertakers and sextons which more than anything bring down the awful fact of death to a miserable reality.

How blank and empty the house seemed! Baby had never made herself felt as her brother had done from the very first. She had not yet learned to run alone nor say an intelligible word, and only one short year ago there had been no little Marie in the home; yet now she had gone away she had left behind her a sense of immeasurable loss. The pen which was writing the order for a coffin for a young child stopped, and he leaned his head on his hand with a heavy sigh. He had been so pleased with his little daughter, especially lately, when she had begun to know him and crow at his approach; he had so looked forward to her being able to chatter to him and run about, holding to his hand; and now it was all over; the little life was finished before it was well begun.

If he felt it so, to whom the baby was but an occasional incident in a busy day, what must it be to her mother, who had seldom had her out of her arms? How would she bear it! His heart ached with pity for her. He stole into her room again presently with her morning coffee, but his gentlest inquiries how she felt, his coaxing suggestions that she should try and take something, were met with the same sullen silence, though afterward Lina told him that when he had gone away she had sat up and taken some breakfast. He thought he understood: she was brooding on the bitter word the doctor had said of "too late," and she feared lest he should reproach her.

How little she knew! If only she would have opened her heart to him, and let him comfort her, and assure her that he had no blame, only pity for her, that he knew it was excess of jealous love for her little one, and not neglect, had been the cause of the disaster that had made their home desolate. It hurt him that she could fancy he could be cruel to her at such a time. The kindest thing he could think of to do for her, since she would not let him speak to her, was to send for her aunt to come and be with her over the funeral.

Presently, while he was interviewing an obsequious person in black with a manner of professional sympathy, the old Hausmann came puffing upstairs to request that he would go down and speak to the Herr Intendant, who would rather not come up, but said he must see him for a moment. He had sent a note an hour ago to ask that his understudy might be put onto his work for the next few days.

The Herr Graf was fuming about the bleak stone entry at the foot of the common staircase. He seemed less at ease than usual.

"I am deeply concerned," he began; "most distressing occurrence! I would not come up on any account to disturb Frau Dahlmann. Pray make her my most sincere condolence."

"Thanks." Dahlmann waited. He did not flatter himself that the Count had called on purpose to condole.

"It is doubly unfortunate," pursued the Intendant, hitting at his boot with his cane. "In the agitation of grief you have no doubt forgotten that to-night is the special performance before the Blähsische Wagner Verein."

"I am very sorry to put you out, Herr Graf, but death will not be postponed to operatic engagements."

"True, alas! too true; but surely on this most special

occasion you would not allow your feelings—your most natural feelings—to stand in the way of Art.”

“You don’t mean to say that you expect me to sing to-night? Why, it is not seemly.”

The Count shrugged his shoulders and turned out the palms of his hands.

“As to that,” he said, “not a soul in Blankenstadt, beyond your immediate circle, will know anything of your lamented bereavement until you put the notice in the papers. We public men, Herr Dahlmann, have frequently to trample on our private feelings.”

“I really do not see,” said Dahlmann, speaking with suppressed annoyance, “what is the use of having an understudy if it is not for occasions such as this. It will be a good opportunity for him to show what he is fit for.”

The Intendant threw up his hands. “Heaven forbid that he should have a chance of showing the Wagner society what he is fit for! You must know as well as anybody how immeasurably behind you he is. A thing like the ‘Götterdämmerung’ would simply fall to pieces without you. On an ordinary occasion I would most gladly have changed the opera to accommodate you, but you know the society are coming mainly with the object of hearing your Siegfried; the thing has been fixed for a month, and there is no time to postpone. There, like a good fellow, say you will not fail us.”

“Very well,” he answered reluctantly. Hedwig need not know. It was not as if she needed him. For himself perhaps it was as well to bury his sorrow in his work. “But you must not expect me to be in very good voice: I have been up all night.”

“Thank you, thank you,” said the Intendant effusively. “I am really grieved to have to demand this of you. But, after all, though of course very distressing to

a parent, the death of a young infant is not quite the same as the loss of an older member of one's family. Never mind rehearsal. Lortzing shall take your place this morning."

Hedwig came in to dinner, but sat during all the meal with her head leaning on her hand and her tears dropping unchecked into her untouched plate. As her husband was leaving the table, she raised her head and spoke to him. "I have just had a telegram from my aunt. She says she will come off this afternoon. The boat gets in about a quarter past eight. Will you go down to the quay and meet her?"

"I am so sorry, dear; I am afraid I cannot possibly. Let Lina take a cab and go. Your aunt will excuse it, I know."

"But why? You have nothing to do, and you cannot surely want to go out and amuse yourself at such a time."

"It is no question of amusing myself; but I am sorry to say I am compelled to sing to-night."

She turned upon him. "To sing! You could go and sing with your own child lying dead in the house. I know your heart is as cold and hard as a stone, but I did not think even you could be so brutally unfeeling, so lost to all decency."

"Hedwig!" he cried, "you have no right to speak to me like that. It is intensely painful to me to have to do it; but to-night it could not be helped. It is no use explaining it to you. You wouldn't understand, and you wouldn't care."

"I understand enough about it to know that the opera is changed easily enough at the last minute if you have a cold or somebody's little finger aches. Of course I know that you could have had leave if you had chosen to ask for it."

"I sent round to the management the first thing this

morning to say I could not sing, but it unluckily happens that to-day people are coming from a distance for a special performance, and the Intendant came round himself to beg I would not fail him. After to-night I shall stay with you for the rest of the week."

"You need not trouble yourself. Do you think I am blind, that I do not see that you only want to escape from the dullness of a mourning home to go and flaunt on the stage with Miss Arrowsmith? Very well. Go."

He came round the table, and stood close in front of her, his arms folded, his breath coming quick and short. For a moment she quailed; but his voice, when he did speak, was quiet and suppressed.

"If I did not think you are almost crazy with your grief, that you cannot know what you are saying, I would make you answer me for those words." He had almost said "insolent words," but he forced back the harsh epithet. He moved toward the door; then paused. "Your sorrow is mine, too. I would have shared it. I take God to witness that you drive me away from you."

XX.

"Is Dahlmann really going to sing to-night?"

"I don't suppose he could get off it with this Wagner Verein coming."

"H'm; too jealous of his reputation to stand aside and give Lortzing a chance."

"Oh, I am not ambitious of one, thanks. The rehearsal was quite enough for me. I have been as nervous as a cat all day lest he should throw it on me at the last minute."

"He won't do that. What he says he'll do, he'll stick to; that you may depend on."

Then Sophie Brenner struck in. "How wanting some men are in sensibility! I do pity his poor wife. Minnie Pappelheim says the idea of his singing so upset her."

Miss Arrowsmith had just joined the group. She said nothing, but at that moment she looked up and caught sight of Dahlmann, standing just within the doorway at the opposite end of the room in his coat of mail. He seemed much as usual; he was always grave, but there was a strained look about his eyes. She went over to him; to-night she would not wait for him to come to her.

He pressed her hand hard in answer to her murmured words of sympathy. "Don't say anything kind to me, please, till this is over," he said. "For this evening I must try and forget."

"Are you up to singing?" she said anxiously.

"Oh, I suppose so: I must be. I wish it were well over."

"So do I. And how is——" she began; but he put out his hand.

"Don't!" he said. "Tell me about your mother; is she better?"

"A little, I think, thanks; but her cough is still very troublesome."

She stood beside him till the call-bell rang, hardly knowing how to talk to him, but feeling that her presence kept others off. All through the performance, lengthy at any time, interminable to-night to the two chief singers, she seemed to his strained senses to be shielding and sustaining him in some inexplicable way. He could not have put into words what she did for him; but he had the feeling that without her help he could never have got through.

We all know the story of Pierrot, compelled to turn his back upon his sorrow, and face the ring with laugh and jest, but Dahlmann felt that to have pretended to jest would have been easier. The tragic intensity of the music tore his own heart, while in the listeners in front the pathos in his voice wrought a sense of pleasurable pain. By the end of the second act the effort it cost him was perceptible to those on the stage with him, and when he had gone off Brünnhilde was so nervous and distraught that her scene with Hagen and Günther was for some moments in jeopardy. His call at the close of the act was not responded to, and she had a momentary impulse, as she returned with Armbrecht and Lortzing from making her courtesy before the curtain, to ask one of them to look after Herr Dahlmann. She refrained, however. She was not wont to concern herself much about her fellow-creatures, and they would think it odd; besides, she bethought her that solitude and the ministrations of old Diehl, his dresser, would be more comfortable to him than to be worried with condolences.

Armbrecht, however, said, as he handed her back: "Poor Dahlmann! It was hard on him to have to sing to-

night. He seems to take the loss of the little one very much to heart."

"Yes, I suppose it is trying," she responded, as she gathered up her train.

He looked after her a moment. "Some women are singularly like ostriches," he remarked.

Painful as that evening had been, Dahlmann would have been thankful for his work through the wretched days that followed. He could not, of course, practice; and deprived of his usual occupation, and with no heart for his favorite resources, he hung about the darkened house with his pipe or the paper, feeling himself terribly in the way. For Hedwig's aunt, with the country conviction of the superior economy of work done at home, and thinking the employment good for her niece in her affliction, had insisted on her having a sewing-woman to help make her mourning in the house; so every room was littered with scraps, and pervaded by the sickly smell of black dye which the close stoves drew out from the new crape. Tante Sophie and the seamstress tried to keep up the spirits of the bereaved mother with a stream of subdued gossip; and the clicking of the scissors, with the sound of the women's melancholy voices in the dim light, jarred Ehrenfried's nerves unbearably, while out of doors the weather, still gloomy, raw, depressing, offered little relief.

There was only one still place in the house. Now and then he stole into the silent nursery where, among the white flowers, his own little waxen white blossom lay in the deathly hush.

Between him and Hedwig no word had been spoken as to their quarrel, and he had tried to forget it, but it had left its mark. She had been thoroughly frightened, and though she never thawed to him, she treated him with a deprecating meekness that was not lost upon her

aunt. He felt that his singing that night, the necessity for which she had been quite unable to grasp, must have been a great shock to her, and he tried to make allowance, but the form her reproaches had taken rankled, and there lingered a trace of resentment and coldness in his manner. It was not wonderful if the Frau Mühlerinn, watching them, drew her own conclusions, and treated Hedwig with an ostentation of compassionate tenderness.

It seemed as if those hushed and darkened days lasted a long, long while, but they were over at last, and the mourners left little Marie under the sodden turf in the bleak new cemetery outside the town. It had been arranged that Hedwig should go back with her aunt immediately after the funeral for a little change of scene, and Dahlmann went down to the quay to see them on board the boat. He wished they would have left him the little boy; it was rather miserable to think of returning to the silent, deserted house.

On his way home he turned down the Finkenwiese to inquire for Madame Malaxa, who had been laid up with an attack of bronchitis, and to thank her for the exquisite wreath she had sent for the baby's grave. As he came in sight of the house he saw Clare just turning into the doorway. She waited till he came up.

"Oh, come in!" she said. "My mother is a little better to-day, and she would like to see you for a few minutes. She has been thinking so much about you. You must not let her talk more than a minute or two," she added, as she preceded him up the stairs, "for it makes her cough, and she is weak still."

She led him into the little boudoir within the drawing room that Madame Malaxa called her den, where she was sitting muffled up beside the fire, looking very small and frail. She held out both hands to him.

"My dear boy, what a sorrow you have been through since I saw you! Come and tell me about it. It must have been very sudden."

He went and sat down in the low chair close beside her, and carried the soft, wrinkled hand to his lips. Clare left them together, feeling sure that her mother's tender sympathy would do him good. She thought it had, for when he came out the hard, set look on his face had changed, and there was a tear on his blond eyelashes. He held out his hand silently to say good-by, but she detained him.

"Won't you stay and have tea with me? It will warm you. You look blue with the cold." She drew his favorite armchair a little nearer to the fire as she spoke, and threw on another log, which made the flame go sparkling up the chimney, and sent a warm, flickering light through all the room. There was no one waiting for him at home. He sat down and held out his hands to the blaze.

"I am not usually a chilly mortal; but it was very cold and wretched out there, with the snow beginning to fall again." He shivered. "And I keep thinking of the little thing left there alone under the snow. It is folly, of course; one knows it is fancy, and yet——"

"Oh, I know!" said Clare. "I should feel just the same. It is so hard to realize that the body one has seen and touched is not the self. One can't help feeling as if they must be lonely and cold. It is that far more than the personal discomfort that makes the misery of a wet funeral. Was her poor mother able to be there?"

"No; she wanted very much to go, but she could not have borne it. She has been far from well for some time. She has gone up to the Lindenthal with her aunt this afternoon. Frau Tucher could not stay away from home longer, and Hedwig was not fit to be left. I expect she will be away two or three weeks."

"Selfish little wretch!" was Clare's inward comment; aloud she said: "I almost wonder you did not apply for a week more and go too; it would have been better for you, and I am sure you could have got it; the Herr Intendant was so grateful to you for singing that night and so concerned to have had to ask it of you. He is really very good-hearted."

"Oh, I know; he offered it; but it is better for me to get back into harness again. I don't find that idleness agrees with me."

"But it must be so desolate for you at home all alone," she began; but the look on his face stopped her.

They sat silent a few minutes, he absently stirring his tea, and gazing into the glowing coals. Clare felt he was hardly in the mood for ordinary talk, and they were too much at ease with each other to feel the need for incessant conversation. Presently he spoke, suddenly, but in a low tone:

"Do you know, my wife has scarcely spoken to me since the day after our child died."

"Oh!" she said in a concerned tone, and hardly knew what to add. She could see that he spoke out of the stress of an unbearable pain; but such unreserve was so unlike him; she was afraid he would presently wish his words unsaid. He was not a man who ever talked of his domestic concerns, but for some time she had suspected some estrangement, or, at least, such gradual cooling as often takes place where tastes and characters diverge; but this was worse than she had thought. The pause this time grew irksome, and she tried to think of some palliating suggestion. "I heard she was very much distressed at your appearing in the opera that evening; the Herr Graf ought not to have made you."

"She was dreadfully upset about it, and I was sorry I had given in; but that was not all, there was something

wrong before. Upon my soul, I don't know what I have done. Whether it was because I sometimes grumbled at the poor mites for making a row, and bundled them off to the nursery—Heaven knows how thankful I would be to hear baby's little cry again!—perhaps it was that; but Hedwig seems to forget that the children are mine as well as hers."

"I think Frau Dahlmann has always been a little inclined to be morbid," said Clare gently. "Perhaps, unhinged by her great grief, she takes an exaggerated view of some little thing you have almost forgotten."

"Maybe. And possibly she is brooding over not having sent for the doctor in time. You know, the baby had been ailing for some days, and when I got in from rehearsal that morning I wanted her to let me fetch him; but she fancied he was too young, and she thought she knew, and then in the night when the child was worse it was too late. I am afraid she thinks I should reproach her, poor girl. I was only ten times more sorry for her. But I can't speak of it unless she does."

"Perhaps her aunt understands her. Did you talk to her about it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you knew Frau Tucher you would understand what a hopeless suggestion that is," he said. "You have been very good to listen to me. I am ashamed to have uttered these unmanly complaints; but for a week I have had nothing to do, and almost no one to speak to, and in this kindly atmosphere it seemed as though my misery would find words. Forget it, please."

"Don't apologize. What would be the use of friends if not to open one's griefs to? I am so sorry; it seems so hard that this misunderstanding should have come just when you were in trouble. I wish I could help you."

"You do!"

She leaned forward and laid her hand on his with a gesture of womanly compassion. His other hand closed over hers before she could draw it back, and he rose to his feet, looking at her with a hungry, passionate yearning in his eyes; hers, which had been swimming with a pity in which there was no self-consciousness, fell, and she half drew her hand away. He dropped it abruptly. "Good-by. I am afraid I have stayed too long," he said. He was gone, and she heard his steps echoing down the stone stairs before she well knew what had come to him or to her.

For the moment she was startled, but she shook it off. After all, it was nothing—a look, a touch; it was absurd to have noticed it. He was unnerved, and she had perhaps been a little too sympathizing. Well, it just showed that even with the best of men one needed to be guarded and to remember that one was a young woman; but she was annoyed to have the fact brought to her mind. She took a hasty, restless turn through the room, and then gave a little stamp with her foot. It must never be remembered or thought of again; nothing must be allowed to mar the even tenor of their friendship.

She went into her mother's room.

"Did Ehrenfried stay long?" asked the Countess.

"A little while. I gave him some tea."

"Do you think there is anything the matter?—beyond the child's death, I mean?"

"I think he feels it a good deal," said Clare guardedly.

"More than is natural for a young man to feel the loss of an infant. I hope that selfish little wife of his——"

"Best not to talk of it. Do you know it is time for your cough mixture?"

He had gone down the stairs and out into the dusk as though a demon were pursuing him. He did not turn

homeward, but down through the Finkenwiese into the long, dim alleys of the park, desolate enough now with the icicles dripping from the naked trees, and the great gaunt statues, green and dark with damp, except where the fresh fallen snow had clung to them, standing at intervals among the shadows like pallid ghosts. The snow had ceased falling, and a little icy wind had got up and crept between the trees. It was freezing again, as he could tell by the way the slush began to crackle under his tread. He walked far and fast, but after a time his pace slackened and he began to feel for his pipe. It was difficult to get a light, but he managed it at last in the shelter of the great Hercules; and as he tramped on more slowly with his hands deep in his pockets, he began to take himself to task.

What madness had come over him? What must she have thought? Abrupt as his leave-taking had been, he was glad that he had got away before any word had broken out to betray the feeling that had overwhelmed him. For a spoken word could not be taken back, and must have shattered their friendship as a precious glass is shattered by a blow. He knew Clare too well not to know that if he, another woman's husband, appeared in the guise of a lover he could never be forgiven. He recalled her scorn when she had suspected him of meditating an unfaithfulness to his betrothal. What must she think of him now—if she had guessed?

He felt it doubly shameful in him at such a time, when the sacredness of a great sorrow brooded over his home, when his wife was crushed by her grief, that he could have been overcome by a feeling that was a treachery to her. Poor Hedwig! She had more justification than she knew for the suspicions that had so angered him. He had been secure in the rightness of his own conduct. The suggestions of evil tongues he had shaken off with

contempt; but the enemy now was from within, not from without, and he lowered his proud head in self-disgust. How could he have outraged the divine pity and friendship Clare had shown him with such confidence, and her mother's trust in him, by such frantic folly? He stood still, grinding his heel into the gravel, and cursed himself for self-betrayal.

And why had it come to him just then? Did he not, night after night, take her hand, hold her, touch her without the faintest thought of wrong? But that was the actress—Elsa, Isolde, Elizabeth. This evening it had been Clare, the woman, who had touched him and woke the anguished life, that which he had been trying to throttle and hold down. Ever since he first had known her some dim consciousness of what she might be to him had stirred and been smothered; now it was no use denying it; he loved her, as a man loves the one woman he chooses out of all the world. His whole nature hungered for her. Till lately he had seemed content; but it was the contentment of a starving man who is asleep, and while he sleeps forgets his pangs. He was awake now, and would not sleep again so easily.

And what was to be done? Was he to fly; to avoid her? To insult the purity of her friendship by letting her see that he found danger and temptation in it? God forbid! He was on his guard now, face to face with the risk, and he could surely trust himself to keep a straight course. If it was a question of enduring pain, the bitter-sweet of seeing her, while knowing her forever out of reach, would be less intolerable than the ghastly blank of cutting himself off from her entirely. He must be strong and resolute. No disloyal thought must be suffered to mar that precious friendship that he could not live without. He would keep an iron hand upon his feelings. Hedwig should have no right to reproach him.

He had known for a long time that his marriage would never be anything but unsatisfying, and he had tried to solace himself with a pure and honest friendship. Well, it was better, after all, to face it out and see where the danger lay, than to drift, however sweetly, over the rapids.

XXI.

ONE May morning Hedwig was hovering about the breakfast table, preparing a bowl of bread and milk for her little son, and casting curious glances at the letters that lay beside her husband's plate, for he had not yet got in from his morning swim in the river. One especially attracted her attention; it was thin, and bore a Bavarian postmark, and was evidently in a woman's handwriting. He had no feminine correspondents, so far as she knew, and she continued to speculate about it, and to wish the thin paper were transparent, till he came in.

It was the first he opened, and as his eyes fell on the contents he uttered an exclamation. It seemed to excite him a good deal, and his wife watched the expressions which chased each other across his face with eager curiosity. First surprise and an almost triumphant gratification, then perplexity, hesitation, and a slight touch of disappointment. But he folded it up and put it in his pocket without a word. This was too much for Hedwig.

"You seem deeply interested in that letter, Friedel: what is it?" she asked.

"I can't tell you yet, my dear. It is a matter of business that I shall have to talk over with the Herr Intendant before I can say anything about it. You shall know all in good time."

"Business? Why, I thought it looked like a lady's letter. Is it an offer to join another company? I wish it might be; I hate Blankenstadt. Be quiet, Toni." For that young gentleman, thinking his breakfast was in

danger of being forgotten, was drawing attention to his claims by drumming loudly on the table with his spoon.

But Ehrenfried was not to be beguiled into admissions as to the contents of his letter: he only remarked, "Contracts are not so easily set aside," and proceeded to unfold his morning paper and see what was the report of last night's performance.

Though Hedwig's guess had not quite hit the truth, it was not far off. It was not indeed a proposal to forsake Blankenstadt, but it was an invitation which made Ehrenfried's pulses beat high with triumph; it was a letter from Madame Wagner herself to ask if Herr Dahlmann could undertake the *rôle* of Tristan at the forthcoming festival. It was so unexpected it almost took his breath away. He well remembered, a few weeks ago, one night after "Tristan und Isolde" had been performed, the Intendant had taken him round to one of the principal boxes, and presented him to a gray-haired, eager-eyed woman, whose absorbed attention had caught his notice even while he was singing, little as he was given to occupying himself with the people in the house. When he knew who it was that was saying such gracious, kindly things about his singing, that it was she who had stood closest to the Master, and best knew his mind, who spoke so cordially, he was indeed a proud man; but that she had come to Blankenstadt on purpose to hear him and judge whether he deserved his reputation never entered his mind. He knew, of course, as all the musical world knew, that Bayreuth had been in much anxiety about the Tristan of many successive festivals, whose health had failed, and yesterday's papers had announced that Herr Fink had been ordered to take entire rest for a time, but it was understood that Madame Wagner was prepared with a substitute whose name had not transpired; that he himself was the honored one on whom her choice had fallen,

he never guessed. Not a word had been said about it at the time, unless, indeed, she might have hinted the possibility of it to Graf von Wenzel; he, indeed, was almost the only person who was aware of her presence in the theater that evening; she probably wished to see how matters would turn out with Fink before saying anything definite. The request was couched as a favor asked, not conferred, and it was one he could not dream of refusing, and yet—— It was the crown of success, but there was a thorn in it. What would become of that summer plan on which he had been building? He had been almost engaged for a concert tour in America during the six weeks while the Blankenstadt Theater would be closed, with Miss Arrowsmith, Herr Armbrecht, and two or three singers from Vienna. Well, of course, any singer would gladly set aside other engagements for the chance of distinguishing himself in such an arena. It would add enormously to his prestige, and would, no doubt, be considered a sufficient excuse.

He went early to rehearsal, but, as ill luck would have it, Clare was late, and it was not till they were standing side by side upon the stage while an instrumental passage was being repeated that he found opportunity to slip the letter into her hand, saying, "Tell me what you think of this."

She flashed a brilliant look upon him as she returned it. "I am so glad! This is a crowning honor."

"Of course I must accept it?"

"Could you hesitate? Of course you must. I should look at it almost in the light of a royal command; all the more as there is no emolument. Think of the honor of singing in the Master's own theater—of giving one's service!"

"I have not spoken to the Herr Intendant yet; I don't suppose he will make any difficulties; though, of

course, it means being constantly at Bayreuth for the next month to come as well as at the time."

"Not he; he will understand the importance of this. You see, it will enhance your value tenfold. By the way, it ought to enable you to make a much better bargain with him next time."

She had to go on singing then, so no more could be said, and at the close of the rehearsal Dahlmann sought out the Intendant with the result which she had foretold; Graf von Wenzel was enchanted; he felt the honor was done to Blankenstadt and his own perspicacity, and willingly promised all the leave of absence that should be necessary. Blankenstadt must be ready to make its share of sacrifice for the glory of Bayreuth. He assured Dahlmann that it would be quite worth his while to pay compensation to the American impresario if necessary, but the contract had not yet been signed.

Coming out, he overtook Clare and her maid in the corridor and joined her; Babette discreetly fell behind.

"It is all right," he said in a tone that sounded a little as if it were all wrong. "I can go as soon and as often as may be necessary."

"What is the matter with you?" said Clare, turning her head a little to look at him. "You don't seem like a person into whose hand trumps have just been liberally dealt! Was the Intendant unpleasant about it?"

"By no means; he quite plumes himself upon it. He urges me to make any sacrifice sooner than miss the chance."

"Shall you have to pay an indemnity? Had you signed? I had not."

"No. By the end of the week I should have."

"How lucky!"

He made no answer, but walked a little way by her side in silence. He did not want to speak what was in

his mind, and with Clare he always had a difficulty in pretending. He was hurt that she did not seem to give a thought to the overthrow of his share in their summer plans, and he wondered if that side of the question had even occurred to her. Yet he had no right to reproach her. The claims of friendship are very undefined; besides, if she could spare his company without regret, why, so much the better. It was a topic on which it was more judicious to say nothing. Then Clare turned to him suddenly with one of those odd smiles of hers that seemed to look right down into the depth of his thought, and said:

"How tiresome you are, Ehren! I am trying my best to do a friend's part and rejoice in your good fortune without giving useless regrets to the break-up of our delightful little scheme, and you refuse to be proud or pleased, or anything that you ought to be, and it is uphill work to do all the rejoicing myself."

The cloud lifted a little, and the prudent barrier of silence broke down.

"You do care a little, then? You will miss me?"

"Of course I shall, and so will mother. Don't be foolish! Personally it is most disappointing not to have you; but it can't be helped: duty and pleasure and self-interest all point the same way. It will be the making of your reputation."

"I know, and I am an ungrateful brute; but indeed I do feel deeply what an undeserved honor it is; only—only it is incomplete; if you were to be Isolde——"

"Don't—don't make me envious. That will never be. Even if the part were vacant I fancy my nationality would always stand in my way. I must not think about it or I shall loathe America."

"Well, I suppose if one's dearest wishes ever are granted in this perverse world, there is always a might-

have-been beyond, and so we are never content. I am truly proud, though."

They parted at the corner, and Clare hastened home to her mother, full of the news of Ehren's triumph. Madame Malaxa was unfeignedly delighted on more accounts than one. She was genuinely pleased at the tribute paid him; but, moreover, she privately rejoiced at the break-up of the joint concert tour, about which she had had some anxious misgivings. It was not that she had not the most complete confidence in Dahlmann's rectitude as in Clare's, or did not regard the friendship between them as perfectly innocent; but was it perfectly safe? Now and then she became aware of a little breath of gossip blowing up about their names, and it made her uneasy. She dreaded the increased intimacy of the voyage; if it did no other harm it would give rise to comment, yet she could not see her way to avert it. She was loath to trouble the proud serenity of her daughter's mind by a caution which might only do harm; she could only trust to her own watchful tact. It was a relief to find that there would be a complete break; and who could tell? Clare might make new interests and form new ties.

Late in the afternoon she went out alone to do a little shopping, and, catching sight of Frau Dahlmann on the opposite side of the street, she crossed to meet her with unusually beaming smiles. Hedwig, who knew herself not a favorite in that quarter, rather tolerated for Ehren's sake than liked for her own, was quite astonished at the cordiality of the outstretched hand.

"My dear Frau Dahlmann, I do congratulate you. How proud you must be!"

Hedwig shook hands, looking perplexed and uncomprehending.

"What an unsympathetic little creature she is!" thought

the Countess; "I dare say she does not in the least understand the importance this is to him. Probably she thinks, as it is unpaid work, that it is of less instead of more consequence than anything else that might have been offered him." Aloud she said: "Ah! you hardly realize how much we operative people think of these things. This will make him known to a far wider public than that of Blankenstadt. I suppose you will go with him."

"Oh, no!" said Hedwig, thinking of the American tour. "One cannot drag a little child about on such long journeys, and I could not possibly leave Toni."

"Why, it is not more than a few hours, and you can get such nice clean quiet lodgings there. It is such a peaceful little town."

Hedwig was completely bewildered; she had not the most remote idea what Madame Malaxa was talking about, but she was resolved she would not say so. As a rule, she was rather dense; her mind moved slowly, but on this occasion her senses were sharpened, and she put two and two together with remarkable celerity. She remembered that letter on the breakfast table about which her husband had declined to satisfy her curiosity; no doubt he had consulted these friends of his before telling her; when all was settled she was to be informed like a child. Her face flamed with vexation, but she tried not to betray her discomfiture. She said in as careless a manner as she could assume: "Oh, I am surprised it should have leaked out. My husband was so anxious it should not be mentioned till all was settled. We have not quite decided yet what we shall do."

It was Madame Malaxa's turn to be puzzled; she even felt slightly snubbed. Evidently it would not do to pursue the subject further, so she said good-by and walked on.

Hedwig went on her way at first in a little glow of

self-satisfaction that she should, as she imagined, have worsted her adversary and concealed her own discomfiture, but by the time she reached home this had cooled down considerably, and she was disposed to believe that the superhuman sagacity with which she credited Madame Malaxa must have divined her ignorance and be making merry at it now. She had a right to be vexed; it was annoying to be the last to be informed of her husband's affairs, and she did not remember in excuse how often she had repulsed his confidence about his work, and made difficulties about the things on which his heart was set. By the time she reached the top of the stairs she had worked herself up into a state of indignation which foredoomed all attempts at explanation to failure.

Unluckily, Ehrenfried was singing when she went in; she did not dare interrupt, but to have to bottle up her wrath through a long scena made it ferment dangerously. She moved restlessly about the room, taking things up only to put them down in another place, and throwing off her hat and veil on the sofa. Her fidgetiness disturbed him presently; not that she made much noise, only the sense of another person prowling about like an unquiet spirit makes absorption in anything, especially music, well-nigh impossible. He brought his hands down upon a chord, and looked up. He meant to tell her about Bayreuth, but her mood just then did not seem propitious; he waited. She set down the vase of flowers she had just taken up so abruptly that it broke, and the water streamed out upon the table. The necessity of picking up the bits of glass and getting a cloth to mop up the pool irritated her further.

"Have you done singing?" she asked, as she finished collecting the scattered blossoms. Her voice had taken on the rasped tone he had learned to know and dread.

"Yes, for the present." He rose and shut the piano.

He did not ask her what was the matter. He had more faith in silence than in speech; he would know soon enough.

Hedwig might sulk, but she rarely kept any cause of offense to herself long. She flung the flowers into the stove and, slamming the door of it, broke out: "I think you might tell me about your plans before taking the whole town into confidence. I know my opinion is quite worthless to you; it is always set aside; but it makes me look like a fool to be congratulated about some astonishing piece of good fortune, and not know what it is all about."

"I am sorry, Hedwig; I don't know who could have talked of it: the Herr Intendant, I suppose. You know, he had to be consulted first before I knew whether I could accept it or not, and he was so pleased and proud, he must have spoken of it. I was going to tell you about it now, only you forestalled me."

"Oh, I dare say! Now that it is all settled, and I have been made ridiculous by knowing nothing about your plans!"

Fond as Hedwig was of a grievance, he could not but acknowledge that this time she had just cause of complaint. He ought to have told her when he came in to dinner, only he wanted to argue himself out of his discontent before he spoke. He was sincerely sorry, but she would not be appeased, neither would she sit down nor listen to anything he tried to say, but continued to roam restlessly about the room, while he sat on the music stool, occasionally wheeling round a little to try and follow her erratic motions. Presently he broke out, "I wish to goodness people would leave my affairs alone!"

"Well, at any rate, it is not poor Minnie this time. It is your friend Miss Arrowsmith who has been babbling. I met Madame Malaxa, and she crossed the street on

purpose to find out whether I knew. I pretended I did, and that you wished me not to mention it, but it put me in a very awkward situation. She was so inquisitive I was afraid every minute I should betray that I had not a notion what she was talking about. I wanted to find out too; but I was not going to be beholden to her for information about my own husband."

Ehrenfried smiled a little. "I am glad you did that. I assure you I never intended to keep you in the dark; only, don't you see, I had to consult not only the Intendant, but the other people whom I had promised to join for this concert tour, before throwing them over. Its having come round to you in this sort of way is purely accidental."

Hedwig sniffed. "Another time you had better explain to your friends that your wife knows nothing of your affairs, and they must be good enough not to allude to them before her."

He rose. He was almost at the end of his patience. "I thought you would have been pleased," he said; "for now you and the little chap can go with me, but I suppose you don't care. Perhaps you would rather go home?"

He still had not grasped the fact that she did not yet understand what it was that had been offered to him, and, taking up his hat from the table, he went toward the door. Hedwig fairly stamped with annoyance. "How much longer do you mean to leave me in this suspense?" she cried; "or do you wish me to go to Miss Arrow-smith and ask her to kindly inform me what you are going to do?"

A red flush rose to his forehead. "Be good enough to leave her name out of it, will you?" he said sternly. He stood still a moment, biting the ends of his long mustache, then made his announcement curtly, dryly. "The letter you saw this morning was a request that I would

undertake the *rôle* of Tristan at the Festspiel at Bayreuth in consequence of the illness of one of the principal tenors. Perhaps you know that it is about the highest honor that can be paid to a singer to ask him to sing there, and therefore the other plan was set aside almost without question, though the notice was short. As it affects you, I shall only be obliged to be there for certain days in the week, so I can either go to and fro or take rooms for you and the child there as may seem best. We can settle that later on. I think we will not discuss it any more just now."

Meanwhile Miss Arrowsmith and her mother were talking of the same subject over their afternoon tea, and the Countess was confessing her misdemeanor in the matter.

"My dear Clare, what do you think! I am afraid I put my foot into it in a most unfortunate manner this afternoon. I met Frau Dahlmann when I was out just now, and very naturally congratulated her, and I am quite sure she knew nothing about it. She pretended she did, but she said such odd things, and her manner was so confused, I could see she was quite at sea. Really, Ehren should not be so secretive. I should not like it if I were her."

"How unlucky! Of course she would hate our knowing about it first. How stupid of him not to have told her; but I suppose he felt bound to tell me and Herr Armbrecht before it got about, and everything she hears goes straight to Frau Pappelheim. I am afraid she will give him a *mauvais quart d'heure*."

"I am so vexed I said anything; but I was so overflowing with pleasure that he should have gained such recognition. I suppose I ought to have remembered that his wife is the last person to take any interest in his advancement; she is the most unsympathetic little

creature I ever met. I believe she regards his voice as a mere machine for making money for her."

"And this, instead of bringing in any, will cause him to miss the chance of making a good deal; Vanhuythusen gives a big price. Still, in the long run, it will pay; it will increase his commercial value enormously. I suppose," she added after a pause, "he could not run over for the last bit of the tour; the Festspiel only lasts till the middle of August."

"Don't suggest it to him, Clare," said the Countess with unusual decision. "I would rather you did not. I think on some accounts it is just as well as it is."

Clare looked up and opened her lips to speak, then changed her mind and began pouring out some more tea. Presently she said: "He is awfully disappointed about it, and it is really a pity he should miss the chance of raking in a few of the dollars. Besides, the voyage would do him so much good."

"Not at all. After the strain of Bayreuth complete rest will be far better for him. He ought to take his wife and the little boy to the sea." She rose as though the subject were finished, and fetched a newspaper from the writing table. "See here, Clare; this came just after you had gone out; sent by Mrs. Roscoe evidently." She was unfolding it as she spoke. "There is a notice of the death of Edwin Barre."

"Edwin Barre dead!" cried Clare. "What was it? I did not know he was ill."

"No; it was an accident, driving. The horse ran away. Here is the whole account of it. It seems terribly sudden. Poor Marian! I must write to her."

"And there were no children, were there?"

"No; it was a great disappointment; it is a fine property. They must have been married nearly ten years. You remember the wedding?"

"I should think so! It was my first taste of English society. How merry we were! And to think of poor Edwincut off, and Marian a widow! And Barre End will come to Geoff. I wonder where he is now; he would be on his way home. I wonder whether he had started before he got the news."

"Hardly. Of course they would telegraph, and he would go straight back. He will not turn aside to take us on the way, as he intended."

"I am sorry. Dear old Geoff! I should like to have seen him again." And Clare went away to study a new part.

Her mother, left alone, fell into a dream of what might have been if things had but fallen out a little differently. If Clare had been a little older, a little less in love with Art and her new career on that visit, ten years ago, she might now have been on her way to take up her position as mistress of Barre End. If even this news had come a few weeks later, it might have made all the difference. That Major Barre had intended to make a *détour* to Blankenstadt in order to see his old friends on his way home from India, looked as though his mind were still unchanged; whether Clare's were or not her mother could not tell. She was older now, and had more experience of the difficulties and uncertainties of a professional life; perhaps she might not have been averse to exchange it, in spite of her ambition. Ah, well! the chance was little likely to come again now; Geoffrey Barre would have other things to think of and other claims upon him, and would be expected to make such an alliance as would be suitable to the head of an old English family. He might feel he owed a duty to his family in his choice of a wife; it was no longer a matter that concerned himself alone. Her daughter was sufficiently well descended on both sides to be a match for a Barre of Barre End. But

Madame Malaxa was familiar enough with English society to be aware that there would be much shrugging of shoulders and uplifting of hands in all the county round if an opera singer from abroad were chosen to dispense the hospitalities of the Manor House. Well, her castle in the air had been built of cobwebs. She swept it away with a little motion of her hands, and went to consult with Clare's maid about a new costume.

XXII.

RETURNING from his first visit to Bayreuth, Dahlmann hastened straight to the Finkenwiese to share his experiences with Clare. She would be eager, he knew, to hear every detail, for Bayreuth had been the Mecca of her aspirations no less than of his own. Up the stairs he went, two steps at a time, like a boy. The maid who admitted him told him the Herrschaft were in the salon, but did not trouble to announce him; he was too much at home for that. The door stood open, and he stopped a moment on the threshold, for he heard a strange voice mingling with Clare's animated tones,—an unfamiliar one, slow, refined, English,—and over the back of his accustomed chair he saw the top of a slightly grizzled head. Then Madame Malaxa looked up and caught sight of him.

"Ah, Herr Dahlmann! back from Bayreuth? Come in."

"I just looked in to report progress. I did not know you were engaged. I will come another time," and he drew back.

"No, no! Come in and let me make you known to our old friend, Major Barre. He is on his way from India, and turned aside to let us be the first to give him a welcome home. . Geoffrey, this is Herr Dahlmann."

The two men bowed, Ehrenfried somewhat stiffly, and scrutinized each other. In spite of gray hairs the Major was quite a young-looking man, with his alert, spare, well-knit figure and soldierly bearing, though Indian suns had bleached both mustache and skin to a grayish

tint. He had an English ease of manner which to the German seemed to denote that he felt himself quite in possession of the field.

"Herr Dahlmann's name is by no means unknown to me," he said. "I understand that you are the Tristan of this year's Festspiel."

Dahlmann bowed again. "I have that honor. You are musical?"

"As a listener only. I am extremely fond of it."

"Did all go well?" asked Clare as she gave him her hand in greeting.

"Excellently well. Thanks; no, I must not stay now," as she offered him a chair.

"If you had been able to join in this concert tour," pursued Major Barre, "I should have had much pleasure in offering you a berth in my yacht. I am to have the honor of taking these ladies over to America the end of next month. I hope we may have decent weather, and they will not repent it."

"Rough or smooth," cried Clare, "I would rather have a real voyage than be transported in a floating hotel. It will be enchanting. Don't you envy us?"

"Ehrenfried is better employed," said the Countess with a smile. "I think you have more cause to be jealous of him than he of you. Well, if you must go——"

And with formal thanks on his lips and a detestation of the stranger in his heart, Dahlmann departed.

"So that is your first tenor," said the Major. "What a splendid-looking man! but if he is as stiff as that on the stage I pity you."

"You need not," said Clare a little hotly. "He is the finest actor and the most satisfactory colleague I ever sang with."

"I suppose these singer fellows get spoilt and give themselves airs."

"Oh, it is not airs!" cried the Countess. "Poor Ehrenfried! he is horribly shy off the stage, and puts on that grand manner to hide it. He is a dear fellow, and we are great friends."

The mental picture that he carried away of that Englishman occupying the niche in the Finkenwiese that had so long been his haunted Dahlmann. It followed him to Bayreuth, and intruded itself between him and the magnificent Isolde in whom he was trying to find some of Clare's magnetic influence. It stood at his elbow among the throng in the Wahnfried salon, deadening the sound of compliments paid him by celebrities great and small—compliments whose chief value would have been the repeating them to Clare. It came between him and the intoxication of a brilliant success, and hovered before his eyes as he read the newspaper praises of his impersonation, and wondered what she would say when she read them.

He knew how it must end. He had received hints from Madame Malaxa of an old attachment, and he could see plainly how anxious she was that it should be renewed. He fancied he detected in her an apprehension lest the demands of his friendship might somehow interfere, and for the few weeks that intervened before their departure for America he effaced himself, the more easily as he was constantly to and fro between Blankenstadt and Bayreuth. He would do nothing to hinder, and no doubt it would be as the Countess wished. The two would be thrown together in the intimacy of a sea voyage, and Clare would be lost to music—and to him.

She had asked him to write to her, and he began a letter, but most likely she would hardly care about it—now. He had written it in the glow of his first triumphant appearance, the same night before he slept, and kept it open that he might add his impressions of

"Parsifal" as a listener. He carried it in his pocket on Sunday, and between the acts, escaping with some difficulty from the grand parade in front of the theater, and the civilities of new acquaintance who wanted to show him attention, betook himself to a little glade on the wooded hill above, where a thick belt of trees screened him from all but a glimpse of blue hills in the far distance. Here he could finish his letter in peace and quietness, with nothing to disturb the music that still floated in his brain; but first he read through what he had already written thoughtfully, with his pencil balanced in his fingers. He might indeed shut out the Sunday crowd below, the sight and sound of the eating and drinking, the laughing and talking, but he could not shut out the vision of the Englishman standing at Clare's side when she should read what he had written. Would she show it to him? If they were already engaged, as was most probable, perhaps she would. What would he, what would any man think of those unreserved confidences, those impatient longings for her presence? He read to the end; then, instead of adding anything more, he tore the letter into small fragments, and let the wind carry them away.

XXIII.

THERE is nothing of which we of this nineteenth century are apt to boast ourselves more loudly than of our improved method of locomotion. Justifiably so far as speed and cheapness are concerned, or facilities of unloading hordes of cheap trippers to devastate every peaceful spot of forest or seashore; but for charm we have not yet hit on anything, not even the much-vaunted bicycle, which can compare with the old ways of traveling—a riding horse for the land, or a sailing ship for the sea.

So thought Clare as the *Seaflower* bore her across the Atlantic through sunshine and fresh breezes. The weather was all that could be wished, variable enough to give the voyagers something to talk about, and to make pacing the deck occasionally a feat of some little difficulty, while the vessel scudded before the wind; never so rough as to make anyone look grave, or send the guests disconsolate to their berths. She was but a small yacht, compact and trim, and her exquisitely dainty cabins were only numerous enough to accommodate two or three chosen friends. Since Madame Malaxa had no one she specially wished invited, Major Barre had included an old military friend of his own, who devoted himself discreetly to the elder lady, leaving the younger to the host. All ought to have been going on wheels, but the Countess sighed impatiently as she watched the pair lounging on deck chairs, or strolling up and down, and wondered why events moved so slowly, and why there rested a shadow of discontent over Clare.

"Are you seasick, Clare?" she asked her a little irritably one evening when they were alone in their cabin.

"Seasick! Darling, no; how could I be in such heavenly weather? What put such a notion into your head?"

"You were so eager for the voyage; you delight so in the sea, and yet you are not satisfied."

"Oh, yes, I am! It is perfect; but there is a kind of languor about it, don't you know? It is an interlude between the fatigue of the long season behind me and the fresh efforts on the other side. It is just the stillness that I appreciate; I am too lazy to enjoy myself actively."

But her mother was not satisfied. "I don't quite understand Geoffrey," she began and hesitated.

"Oh, Geoff is only too good! He waits upon me hand and foot, and anticipates every whim of mine—I wish he would not."

"You wish he would not? Why?"

"Because it seems to create a demand."

"A demand which if you are not ready to comply with you had no business to have come."

"I know. And that is just what worries me. Why did I come?"

"Clare, do you seriously mean to say that after welcoming Geoff as you did, and letting him set aside all the business he ought to be attending to in England to bring you across the Atlantic, just because you said you hated a steamer, you could possibly say No to him?"

"I don't want to say No; but I wish he might not ask me."

"You talk like a perverse and silly child. I thought you had more sense, more womanliness," said Madame Malaxa with a little frown.

"Mother, I don't think you realize what marriage

would mean to me—especially such a marriage as this, which would call on me to give up everything. To most women, I suppose, marriage comes as a sort of fulfillment of their lives; it would break mine off short.”

“Oh, Clare! haven’t you had enough of ambition and vainglory and single-handed struggle? If it satisfies you now, just look forward and think how it may be when your voice fails. You know by how slender a thread a singer holds her power?”

“Would you have me accept Geoffrey as a provision for old age? As one might compete for an almshouse?”

“No, no But I would have you turn your eyes a little from the applause and excitement of your present life, which will only harden you,—which I sometimes am afraid is hardening you,—and let yourself care for a man who is worthy of your love! Oh, Clare! to a woman love does compensate for everything. I have seen it over and over again; I have seen an ambitious, independent woman, with both hands full of work and interests of her own, drop everything to put them in those of the man she loved, not once, but twenty times.”

“Loved, yes; but I have no heart, I believe.”

“Is it possible that you do not care for Geoffrey? I could understand your refusing before; you were but a child, and standing on the threshold of your new life, and besides he was so much older; but the ten years which have matured you have left him still in his prime, and you are able now to appreciate the value of such a character as his, even if the patient faithfulness of so many years does not touch you.”

“But it does. I believe it was that that induced me to come and give myself a chance to get fond of him. You talk as if love would come at will.”

“If you disappoint Geoffrey again you will be incur-

ring a great responsibility. By accepting his invitation you professed yourself ready to listen to him. I shall be ashamed of you if you ill-treat him now."

Next evening Colonel Crozier had gone below early to write letters in the saloon, and Clare was taking a lesson in seamanship from the captain, so Major Barre drew a campstool close to Madame Malaxa's deck-chair.

"I am so glad to find you alone," he said. "I have been wanting a little talk." Then he paused for a minute, folding and refolding absently the paper he had been reading, and she noticed that his hand shook. "I think you know what my hopes and wishes are—have always been," he went on presently.

"I suppose I do," she answered. "And are they still unchanged? Has the change in your prospects made none in your views?"

"Of course not. How should it? Save that I have a better position to offer her now—an English home instead of India and the slow chances of promotion."

"Your family will not like it."

"There are none near enough to have any right to object. Do you think that weighs with her?" with an eagerness in his tone.

"I don't think she has thought of it."

"Do you mind telling me, am I forestalled? I remember I met a very good-looking fellow at your house, who seemed to regard me with a resentful eye as an intruder; perhaps she——"

"Oh no!" broke in Madame Malaxa. "Herr Dahlmann has a wife and child. Clare has never shown any preferences. I fancy hers is a cold temperament. There is no one else in your way."

He sighed, and thought mothers did not always know. "Then I am afraid," he said, "I am personally distasteful. Somehow when I first came home I hoped; she was

so kind and gracious; so she is still, but I feel she is holding me off."

The Countess made a little despairing gesture with her hands. "I am ashamed of her," she said; "I am ashamed of myself. We had no business to have accepted your hospitality; only I did think——"

"Don't say that," he said; "it was good of you to give me the chance; and, for Heaven's sake, don't let her fancy I want to take advantage of the position! I shall refrain from saying anything till we are off the yacht."

"Perhaps that would be best. I think it would be wise to give her time. She is very much absorbed in her work, and I think it would be more of a wrench than you realize to give it up."

It was hard for him to realize it. Personally he was the most modest of men, but he did think the position of mistress of Barre End a more enviable one than that of first singer in a German Residenz, and the applause of the theater, when offered to Clare, always seemed to him an impertinence. Yet he did not want her to accept him for that; the notion that she was trying to like him out of deference to her mother's wishes went into his heart like a knife. Would he care to win her against her will? And he answered himself that he would. With it if possible, against it sooner than not at all. He had cared for her for ten long years, and had let no other woman into his heart, and now that he had found her still free he would not give up; but he would bide his time.

Partly in pursuance of his waiting policy, he did not remain with Miss Arrowsmith and her mother when he had landed them in America. He had promised to join Colonel Crozier in seeing something of the country, so he set off on a short tour with his friend, and was rather astonished, after the long patience he was so well practiced in, to find himself in a restless condition, unable

to take the slightest interest in the Falls of Niagara, and continually longing to fly off to whatever town Clare was announced to sing in. It was something even to hear her spoken of, and he hardly knew whether he most resented her name being in all men's mouths or loved to hear the sound of it.

One evening he chanced to be sitting at *table d'hôte* next to one of those globe-trotting dames who have been everywhere and seen and heard everything. He mentioned Blankenstadt.

"Ah, you know Blankenstadt? Then of course you have heard the great star, Miss Arrowsmith. I wanted very much to have heard her over here this year, but we just missed her at Saratoga; but I daresay she would have been nothing without Dahlmann. I almost wonder she came without him."

"I believe she prefers singing with him," said Major Barre a little stiffly; "but he was engaged at the eleventh hour to sing at Bayreuth."

"Oh, but you know they are inseparable. Blankenstadt was talking of nothing else last winter when I was there. Dear me, now I have shocked you! I suppose one ought not to refer to anything so naughty, but one never looks at the doings of singers and actresses and that sort of people in quite the same light, don't you know. I was sorry for the poor little wife, though. Someone pointed her out to me; such a pretty little thing, but so dowdy."

He had been so stunned and she so voluble that she reached the end of her story without interruption, but when she paused to take breath, he turned upon her "savagely," as she described it to a friend afterward, and said: "Are you aware that you are making the most unwarranted insinuations against a lady who is—whom it seems an impertinence even to defend? I have known

Miss Arrowsmith from her childhood; her mother is one of my oldest friends. I can assure you you have been completely misinformed. Whatever malignant gossip may be afloat in Blankenstadt has not a shadow of foundation."

She looked frightened. "I am sure I beg your pardon," she faltered. "I had no idea Miss Arrowsmith was a personal friend. I think you ought to have told me."

"You gave me no opportunity to do so; but if such things are to be said, it was far better they should be said to me who can give them the lie. And I hope, madam, another time you will think twice before you spread a calumny you can have no means of verifying, simply because it relates to 'singers and those sort of people' whose reputation it pleases you to think does not signify."

And with that he bowed and left the table.

He did not believe one word of it, but it rankled. The mere fact that such things could be said at all, on however slight a foundation, of a woman who held the place in his thoughts that Clare Arrowsmith did, horrified him. Even India had not blunted the old-fashioned sensitiveness with which he regarded the womankind who belonged to him. To hear her name brought forward and commented on in such a way was torture. Oh, that he could take her from a life which made such things possible! Not for a moment did he doubt her. Clare of all women, so proud, so reserved, who even as a child had resented the smallest playful freedom; that any conduct of hers could have given color to such a report was unthinkable. It gave him a sleepless night, however, and made him feel almost ashamed to meet her as he had arranged to do the next day at New York.

He was hardly sorry that he had no time to see her

before the concert began. He missed the train he intended to take, and after a tiresome journey full of changes found himself barely in time for her first song, and the room too crowded to allow of his making his way to Madame Malaxa. Clare was at her best that night; she was looking brilliant, with an unusual glow of color in her face, and she sang with a zest and abandon he had hardly heard before. He managed to waylay her and her mother as they came out, and gave her his arm out to their carriage, while Herr Armbrecht took Madame Malaxa.

"Why, Geoff," she said to him, as they stood a moment on the steps in the glaring electric light, "how ill you are looking; or is it the light? No, you do not look yourself. I don't think these hurried journeys are good for you. Are you sure you are well?"

The gentleness and concern in her sweet voice touched him. He pressed her hand. "Quite well; only I have been a little worried."

"Oh, that English business! I am sure you ought to have been on the spot; it was very wrong of us to take you away. We shall see you to-morrow?"

There was no time for more; other carriages were waiting to come up. As he moved away Herr Armbrecht, whose acquaintance he had made in Blankenstadt, and whom he greatly liked, invited him to supper at his hotel with a few of the other singers. The talk was of the concert, which had been an especially brilliant success.

"The Arrowsmith was in splendid voice to-night," said a bass singer from Munich; "better than she has been the whole tour. I fancied till now that she was one of those who require the accessories of the stage to produce their effect; but this time she quite warmed to her work."

"I expect she got the German papers before she went

on, as I did," said Armbrecht with a smile. "Our Tristan has been distinguishing himself."

"A pity we could not have them both," said an American critic who was of the party. "I was told she would not come without him."

And then the talk went off to Bayreuth. But Geoffrey Barre pushed away his plate and leaned back. The juxtaposition of the two names—the assumption that Dahlmann's success was of supreme importance to Clare—brought back all those odious insinuations.

"Major Barre, you are not eating anything. Let me give you a little more champagne," said Armbrecht, leaning across from his place opposite.

Presently when they had left the table, and were forming in groups about the smoking room, the Englishman made his way to Armbrecht. A certain friendliness had established itself between them, the more readily that the baritone spoke English with ease, whereas Major Barre's German was of a scanty and labored description. "I should be glad of a few words with you," began the latter in a rather hesitating manner.

"Certainly. Yes?" moving toward a comfortable-looking lounge.

"Oh, not here; I thought perhaps you would not mind taking a turn with me outside?"

"Will you come up to my room? I am a little shy of night air."

He led the way, and during the long transit up in the lift and along endless corridors Major Barre's desire for speech had time to cool.

"Now," said Armbrecht, pushing round the rocking-chair and turning on the electric light, "now we shall be quite undisturbed."

But his visitor cleared his throat once or twice, and made some futile observation about the size of the hotel.

"I don't suppose he came up here to discuss the scale of American hotels," thought the other to himself, and, rising from the bed on which he had taken his seat, he proceeded to rummage in a half-unpacked portmanteau. "I always think," he said, "that discussions are best carried on with the aid of tobacco. Will you try one of these?" extracting a box of cigarettes from the chaos. "They were given to me by a fellow at the Russian Legation in Washington who fancied himself as a judge of a weed. I forget what he told me he gave for them. I always stick to a pipe myself."

But when matches had been produced, and the smoking fairly in progress, still nothing came. Armbrecht grew impatient. "You wanted to speak to me about something?" he said.

"I did; and now I have been debating with myself whether I were not too impulsive. It was a very delicate matter on which I was moved to ask you a question, and perhaps, after all, least said the better."

"Just as you please, of course. You may command me." To himself he added: "What on earth can be the matter? If he were twenty years younger I should suppose he wished to confide a love affair. He does not seem like a man who would want to borrow money."

The Major rose from his chair. "I must apologize most sincerely for bringing you away from your friends on a fool's errand. I don't know what you must think of me."

"Oh, never mind about that. I was coming upstairs soon in any case. Pray, don't move. Have your smoke out, and we will talk of other things."

But after a few desultory remarks the Englishman suddenly burst out: "Oh, confound it all! It is absurd that for a scruple I should miss this chance of setting my mind at ease. I am sure I may rely on your discretion."

"To be sure you may. How can I help you?"

"I have no doubt I am making a mountain out of a molehill." He passed his handkerchief over his forehead. "This evening at supper you spoke of Miss Arrowsmith—and Herr Dahlmann."

"Yes. What did I say? Nothing, surely?"

"Nothing of the slightest consequence; but there was an inference that his doings were of supreme interest to her, and it brought up again in my mind some odious gossip, coupling her name with that of the first tenor, which I encountered the other day in traveling. You may say, what is it to me? But I have known Miss Arrowsmith all her life; her father was colonel of my regiment; I cannot let such things pass. I have no doubt whatever that the gossiping woman from whom I heard it colored, if she did not invent, it all; but you are a Blankenstadt man; you know them both; you would know if she had anything to go upon. Tell me."

"Oh, well, Blankenstadt is a hotbed of gossip, of course."

"It is absolutely without foundation, then?"

Armbrecht did not immediately answer; he was screwing the lid of the tobacco jar down very carefully. Then he said slowly, "They are great friends, you know, and people will talk."

"I see you speak with reluctance. That is quite sufficient." He rose.

"No, no," cried the other; "that won't do at all! You will go off with the notion that there is something wrong, and, upon my soul, I don't believe there is. I had better speak quite openly. That it is a perfectly innocent friendship I entirely believe. Friends they must be, thrown together as they are, if they were not enemies. He is as right-thinking, high-minded a man as I ever came across, and what she is it would be impertinent in me to

say. But if you ask me, I do think there is a certain degree of imprudence."

"You mean as regards the comments of an evil-minded world?"

"Well, you see, that sort of relation between a remarkably handsome man and a very attractive woman does lend itself to misconstruction. Besides that, in itself it is not without peril."

"What of the wife?"

"A pretty little nonentity to whom he was engaged when he first came. If he had not been—however, that is done now. Unluckily, they are not supposed to be very happy together, and any adverse reports always arise from among her friends."

"And that adds immeasurably to the risk. If you were a relative—a guardian—what would you do?"

Armbrecht paused, and puffed away a few moments at his pipe, which was in danger of going out. "It is difficult to say," he said at last. "Warnings in such matters are apt to be mischievous. I own I have sometimes thought lately that they were, as one might put it, sailing rather near the wind."

"If Madame Malaxa were alive to it, and could induce her daughter to leave Germany?"

"There are the contracts, you see. If either of them did realize that it would be wise to break off—here they are, bound, for a certain length of time. The only thing that could effectually end it would be if she were to marry away from Blankenstadt."

There was dead silence for a few minutes, through which the clock on the mantelpiece ticked in a loud, obtrusive way. Then Major Barre said in a low voice:

"But if—if she should have become innocently, unconsciously attached to this man——"

"Why suppose it? Some women may be capable of a

genuine platonic friendship; if any are, she would be. In all these years, since I have known her, this is the first time a breath of rumor has ever blown across her name."

The Major held out his hand. "Good-night. I am deeply indebted to you for the frankness and kindness with which you have entered into this matter."

As he went out of the room the other heard him mutter to himself, "Yes, yes; that will be best."

"Is he Don Quixote?" said Armbrecht; "or is he in love with her?"

XXIV.

Most men would have been turned aside from their pursuit; not so Geoffrey Barre. There was in him a tenacity, not to call it obstinacy, that made obstacles to his wishes act as a spur. His faith in Clare was absolutely unshaken. He thought he could understand just how she, in her self-confidence and disdain of the world's comments, had let herself drift into an impossible friendship. There had always been a considerable dash of the good comrade in her. But as Armbrecht had said, the situation was not without risk, and it must, it should be put an end to. One thing was certain: if Clare married him, it must break off entirely her old life with all its connections. It might well be that she found it impossible to withdraw from a friendship she had once allowed while she remained in Blankenstadt, but here was an easy way out of the difficulty; the mistress of Barre End would have no more to do with a German singer.

Major Barre's decision of purpose, however, consisted with considerable personal diffidence, and the last week of the concert tour, which he spent with Clare and her mother, was rapidly slipping away. He made elaborate strategic plans for a momentous interview, and then suffered himself to be turned aside by Clare's skillful counter moves; and it must be owned she was very clever in postponing what she did not wish to meet. Fate, however, is sure to favor resolution sooner or later, and one morning, when he came into Madame Malaxa's private sitting room, he found Clare alone, busy at the writing table.

"I have these notes to finish; excuse me a few moments," she said. "Have you seen the *Times*? It is here."

As he took the paper from the table beside her his eye was caught by a glitter close to her hand. A morocco case lay half open, showing a pendant of large diamonds with a center of an enormous sapphire. He could not restrain an exclamation. She looked round.

"Don't be frightened!" she said. "I am sending it back. I make a rule of never keeping anything but flowers—except, of course, from royalty; the King gave me two lovely diamond stars last Christmas."

"Do you mean that you are often insulted by people daring to offer you presents of this kind?"

"Not often; in our quiet little Blankenstadt not many people have diamonds to throw about in that reckless manner. This comes from a man I have seen at nearly all our concerts in different parts of the country. I understand he is a millionaire from 'out West,' so I suppose he thinks he can do anything. These arrived this morning with a proposal to call upon me; but I am returning them with a civil note which, I should think, would effectually extinguish him."

"I wish you would let me settle him," said the Major grimly.

"My dear Geoff, no; it would be too foolish. You take it too seriously. These annoying episodes happen very seldom, and when they do I think I understand how to deal with them." She was sealing up the packet as she spoke.

He turned away with something very like a groan. "I cannot endure to think," he said, "that you should expose yourself to this life of publicity; that you should have any such matters to deal with on your own behalf. No,"—as she gathered up her notes and moved toward the bell,— "no, this time you must let me speak. I have

tried to again and again, and you have baffled me. Why will you not hear me?"

"I think even now it would be better that I should not." But she came back and sat down again.

"I think you must have seen, must have understood that I have been trying to ask you all this journey if you could not resolve to give up this brilliant and yet hard life of yours and be my wife?"

"I have known it, and I have tried to prevent your asking me because I cannot."

"Have applause and publicity come to be everything to you, Clare?"

"You don't understand; it is not all vainglory."

"You have not thought of it; you will at least consider?"

"I have. I felt that you had not done with that old folly of so long ago. I suppose I did very wrong to let you bring us over. I ought to have known my own mind; but honestly, Geoff, I came because I did wish that I might get to care."

"And I am so repulsive to you that the chance you gave me has turned against me," he said bitterly.

"Oh, Geoff, you know how much I like you! I have the very highest regard for you, but at present it is impossible for me to think of marrying. I am under contract to Blankenstadt for nearly a year and a half."

"Surely," he said, "that might be bought off or set aside somehow."

"It is not so easy, and there is a point of honor involved. Do you know I met an impresario from St. Petersburg the other night who offered me treble my present salary and to pay my fine if I would go to them? I refused with scorn."

"I should expect to be more to you than a new engagement to sing."

"Of course you would; that is just it."

"Oh, why cannot I make you understand what I feel for you? Why do you make it so hard for me to speak? I loved you when you were almost a child; I love you still. Must that go for nothing?"

"It is not that I don't believe in your love; it is rather because I do that I know my own feeling is so inadequate."

"I held back," he went on, "for all these years, not because I had ceased to think about you, but because I could not ask you to exchange your brilliant success for the dullness of an up-country station; but now I can give you a home not unworthy of you."

"You did not think so meanly of me as to suppose that if I did not love you for yourself, you could buy me with Barre End?"

"No, indeed; but I always thought you were ambitious."

"Not in that way. I never could make you understand how little temptation that sort of thing would be to me. Could you fancy me, after the strenuous life I have led, sitting down content with the routine of an English country house? Oh, how well I remember it in your mother's day, when I used to stay with her! An interview with the housekeeper in the morning, a little pottering about the garden and greenhouses, a drive and a round of calls, varied with tea and tennis with country neighbors. And then in the autumn the shooting parties—the men out all day and asleep all the evening."

"I should never ask it of you. My mother was an old-fashioned person. Poor Marian was lively enough, and she never found her country life dull."

"Ah, but she shot and hunted, and played golf. Marian was a typical county lady."

"But you should go to town every year," he broke in

eagerly; "you should travel. You could fill your house with musicians if you chose; and there is the yacht."

"Oh, how foolish and obstinate you are!" she said. "Offer these fine things to someone who will do credit to them and to you. I should only be a failure. Imagine how vexed all your friends and relations would be with you for marrying an opera singer. Indeed, you yourself are rather ashamed of me. No, believe me, you will live to be very much obliged to me for refusing you now. You know it is sheer obstinacy, because you used to love me years ago, and you always thought you owed it to yourself never to change your mind."

"It is true I don't change easily," he said. "Perhaps some day, when you have wearied of your independence, and tasted some of the disillusionments of a life that rests on public favor, you may be glad to find there is one man who does not change."

"Try rather to put me out of your mind, and look for some nice English girl who will appreciate the good things you offer—and the best husband in the world."

He rose. "I don't mean to persecute you. You shall hear no more about it now. When I have seen you safe back again I shall return to England; but when my affairs there are settled, and this contract of yours is worked out, I shall come again—unless you tell me you have met with someone more fortunate than I. And in the meantime, if you can find it in your heart to relent to me, a word will bring me."

XXV.

WANING September brought the opera company flocking back to Blankenstadt, as well as their cosmopolitan public—some from holiday-making, some from reaping fresh laurels elsewhere; but before all settled into harness again Max Lortzing and his pretty wife took it into their heads to celebrate the first anniversary of their wedding day by inviting their friends to an *al fresco* dinner in the Park. Dahlmann and Miss Arrowsmith were naturally chief among the guests, for they had in a sort stood sponsors to the happiness of the young pair. They had not met since Clare's return from America, for Dahlmann had been recruiting from the fatigues of Bayreuth by a few weeks at Warnemünde with his wife and boy, and had only returned the day before. He arrived rather late, so they could only exchange a smile and a "Gesegnete Mahlzeit," as he took his appointed place at his hostess' right hand while she was opposite.

The lengthy midday dinner was over at last—there was little of the picnic character about it, except that the blue sky was the ceiling of their banqueting room and the green grass their carpet. The health-drinkings and speechifyings which the occasion demanded were got through, and the guests were free to disport themselves in the woods or by the shores of the lake as their tastes might lead them. Dahlmann found himself unusually in demand; everybody wanted to congratulate the tenor, and to hear his personal experiences of Bayreuth; for it so happened that he had been the sole representative of Blankenstadt at that year's Festspiel.

"At last," he said, when all the compliments and queries had been duly responded to, and he had sought out Clare, who was standing a little apart with Fräulein Brenner. "I would not have ventured here if I had known what I was going to be let in for. I was commissioned to ask if either of you two ladies would like to be rowed over to the islands; there is a boat just starting. Do you care about it?"—to Clare. She shook her head, and they began to stroll toward one of the long green alleys that led to the more secluded part of the park, while Sophie hastened down toward the lake.

It was wonderfully quiet after the noisy hilarity of the little festival, and wonderfully green in the sheltered glades, where autumn's hand had been as yet but lightly laid on here and there a yellowing spray, while the brown leaves rustled under foot, a soft reminder that summer was nearly over.

"Now," said Clare, "you must begin at the beginning and tell me everything. What became of that promised letter? Did you write it? or were you too busy?"

He reddened slightly. "I wrote it, yes; and then I never sent it. I thought you would be so occupied and taken up, perhaps after all you would not care."

"Care!" She spoke almost angrily. "I did not think it was kind of you to leave me to learn all about it from the papers, after we had talked it over so much beforehand."

"Forgive me. You know what a bad letter writer I am."

"Well, tell me now, then; all the little things that don't get into the papers; everything that you know I want to know."

He tried; but there was a constraint upon him; it was not the usual easy outpouring of confidence. He had persuaded himself that she would have some unwelcome

news to tell him, and he was longing and yet dreading to hear the worst. At length he said, pausing in his walk and looking at her: "I think it is your turn now. I want to hear about America. You enjoyed it?"

"H'm, yes, on the whole, but it was certainly tiring; everything is on such a huge scale; the journeys so interminable and yet at such a speed, the concert halls so vast, the crowds so ecstatic. It takes it out of one."

"You don't look as if rushing about that great continent were the best way of taking a holiday; you are looking thin."

"Oh, I am naturally thin, you know."

"But you enjoyed the yacht?"

"Oh, yes! I enjoyed the yacht, of course; I am so fond of sailing! Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Was I? I beg your pardon. I fancied—I expected—but I have no business to ask questions. I suppose I shall be told when the proper time comes."

"Of course I can guess what you mean. I dare say mother gave you hints of what her wishes were before we went. Since you know so much, I don't see why I should not consult you: we have been such friends, and I have no one I can speak to about it. I have been very unhappy."

She paused a moment, expecting him to speak, but he said nothing, and she did not see the eager question in his eyes.

"For the first time that I can remember my mother and I are at variance. She is very angry with me; she says I am behaving atrociously; I suppose I am."

"How? I don't understand."

"You see, years ago, before he went out to India, Major Barre wanted me to marry him; he wants it still."

"And you cannot make up your mind? It is hard to you to leave the profession?"

She drew a little away. "It is not easy, you see, to root up one's life; but I ought not to have mentioned it; it was a mistake. It is not the sort of matter to discuss even with so old a friend. Please forget that I said anything; it was weak of me. I can see your mind is full of other things, naturally enough."

She had a strange feeling in her throat that in a softer woman would have meant tears. It was as though some prop on which she had been wont to lean had suddenly failed her. Was he indeed uninterested, that he spoke so coldly, or, worse still, did he think it a want of womanly reticence to have entered on the subject with him? "Shall we be turning back now?" she said.

His answer was to take her hand and draw it through his arm. "You know better than to think I could be uninterested in anything that concerns you. If I spoke soberly, it was because I was not sure I quite understood. Tell me more; what is it? What is wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong except my own unreasonableness. Everything is desirable and suitable; in mother's eyes it is perfection."

"And the man himself?"

"Is one of the best of men. If I must needs marry—but why should I?"

"You have not told me yet; where does the objection come in?"

She snatched her hand from his arm impatiently. "Can't you see what it would mean for me to marry? If I marry an Englishman my singing life would be a closed chapter."

"I know." He drew a hard breath, like one who is toiling under a great weight. "And the Frau Gräfin urges you?"

"She does continually. Dear little mother! it is not all ambition; she thinks so highly of Geoff, and she will

talk of the future when I may have lost my voice and may perhaps find myself alone in the world. And then she will have it that by accepting his invitation to go on his yacht I have in a manner pledged myself. Have I, do you think?"

"I don't quite see that, if you find you don't like him enough."

"But I do like him; I think highly of him; only it is such a tremendous sacrifice."

"I don't know that I quite grasp how matters stand between you."

"Well, I refused him, but he would not take it as final. I told him I am bound by contract for more than a year; he said he should wait till then. I gave him no promise, but I have no business to let him wait. Mother wants me to be engaged at once without announcing it, and sing out my contract unless I could honorably be released."

"And you have no personal objection to him? Oh, how can I—how could anyone judge for you in such a case?"

"I only want you to tell me whether in your judgment I should be acting dishonorably if I waited, as he wants me to do—and perhaps refused in the end."

"I don't think you have any right to let him wait if you mean to refuse in the end."

"I don't know what I mean to do."

They walked on for a few yards in silence, and the yellow chestnut leaves floated softly down; then Ehrenfried stood still and spoke in a grave, measured way. "You have asked me for my advice, and I will try to give you the best I am able; it is horribly difficult. I think you ought to weigh well what you are doing before you throw away what seems to offer you so good a prospect. As the Frau Gräfin says, you ought to look forward and think how it may seem to you years hence. You know a singer's career is at best but short."

"I did not think you were so worldly," she put in in a thick voice.

"I should not say this if you had not told me he is a man you can like and esteem."

"You think I ought to accept him, then?"

She was conscious of that strange clutching in her throat again. She felt chilled and discouraged, as if all the world had turned against her: yet she did not know what she had expected him to say.

"I don't say that," he answered slowly; "I only say you ought to consider it."

"Consider! I have done nothing but consider for the last six weeks." She looked up at him suddenly. "Ehren, what has come to you? You are not speaking out your real mind to me. It is not you, but a stranger, who has been haranguing me. I believe my mother must have asked you to use your influence with me. Now, confess; is it not so?"

He shook his head. "I have not seen her. No; I was trying to say what I believed I ought to say." He took off his hat and pushed back his hair with the gesture she knew so well, and a gleam of light came into the blueness of his eyes, which, while he talked, he had kept obstinately bent on the ground. Now he looked full at her. "After all," he said in a vibrating tone that contrasted strangely with the level voice in which he had been speaking—"after all, there is only one question you need ask yourself. Do you love him? And yet, what need to ask? If you did, would you come to me to know whether you should give yourself to him or no. You do not belong to him. You never will."

She stood still in the middle of the path, startled at his sudden change of front and the repressed vehemence of his manner.

"It is true. I am not what people call in love with

him; I don't need anyone to tell me that. If I were, I don't suppose it would seem a sacrifice; but I am not a girl, and I never was sentimental. I have a very genuine regard for him, and the question is whether that ought not to be enough. Just now you seemed to urge that I should look at the matter from the sober and rational point of view."

"I did; I tried to advise you wisely, but there is a higher wisdom, and it was too strong for me. I will not speak time-serving words to you, Clare. Before God, you shall have the truth from me straight as I see it."

It is not often that the closest friends speak to each other so direct from the heart, without convention or disguise. Clare felt a strange shrinking that was almost fear. She could not speak, and he went on: "I dare say there are plenty of happy marriages that are founded on a mere liking, and there are plenty of easy, facile natures that can find content in them; but yours is not one of those. If ever you should meet someone for whose sake you could give up everything, you will not need to ask advice, and, till you do, for God's sake keep the independence of your soul! You don't know what it is to undertake responsibilities and find yourself bankrupt when it comes to paying them. I may be doing very wrong in saying this to you; but I would fain keep you from the wretchedness——" He broke off abruptly. "I have said enough. I pray Heaven you may decide for your real happiness!"

They had reached an opening in the glade which commanded a view of the pavilion where they had dined, and he stood still in the shadow, panting a little as though he had been running. Before them lay the broad park in the brilliant September sunshine, and the group of revelers in their gay dresses made a vivid

picture, framed in with shadowy branches. The statues of nymphs and fauns gleamed white against the bronze background of oaks and beeches, and on the sloping lawn, in front of the quaint little kiosk, the company had reassembled. Natalie, in a white gown, was resting on the grass, with Max in a loverlike attitude bending over her. Fritz Pappelheim and some of the younger chorus singers appeared to be engaged in a romping game, and the pink and blue dresses darting in and out among the trees, with Sophie Brenner's scarlet parasol making a spot of more brilliant color, the glitter of the coffee service, flanked with piles of peaches, grapes, and apricots, made up a dainty pastoral worthy of the pencil of a Watteau or a Lancret.

Ehrenfried regarded it for a moment with somber eyes, then turned away with a sick feeling. To stir up the very depths of the heart, and then with a smile to pick up one's part in the hilarity of such a festive little gathering, is what few are able to do—few men, that is; women are often obliged to.

"I am afraid I must ask you to excuse my going back with you," he said, with an odd return to his formal manner. "I promised to be home early, as Frau Dahlmann was not able to come. Good-by."

But she had to pull herself together and rejoin the rest. Max caught sight of her coming back alone, and went halfway across the grass to meet her.

"What, all alone, Miss Arrowsmith? I thought Dahlmann was with you," he called as he came within earshot.

"Herr Dahlmann asked me to make his excuses. He pretended his wife would not allow him to stay out any later."

Max looked at her rather curiously, she thought, and she resisted the impulse to copy Ehrenfried's cowardice and get away. She walked back beside her host, chatting

gayly, and for the rest of the afternoon made herself decidedly more agreeable than was her wont. She was not usually so lively, and when she parried graciously some banter from her *bête noire*, Herr Pappelheim, Lili and Madame Lortzing exchanged a glance of surprise. America had certainly softened her usual hauteur.

In truth, by an effort of will she could force herself to be brilliant, could excite herself to laugh and jest; quiet she could not be; her strange talk with Ehrenfried had shaken her too much, and till she was alone she dared not let herself think what it all meant. But at last the long function was over, and she was in her own room, free to let her face wear what expression it would. She threw off her hat and leaned back in a low chair with her eyes shut, wondering why she felt so shaky, so unnerved. How strangely Ehren had spoken, how strangely he had looked at her; how suddenly he had contradicted the advice he had given her as though some force he could not control were compelling him to speak! At first he had seemed so cold, so eminently prosaic and reasonable, and then suddenly a flame had broken through the crust. A remembrance, which she tried in vain to close her mind to, came before her of the afternoon of his little girl's funeral. But what was there to remember? It was nothing. Was it nothing? A little shiver of shame and fear ran over her as she thought how cruel, how obtuse she had been in insisting on his advising her, and, not content with his conscientiously tendered counsel, in forcing him to speak his mind. How well he had behaved, and she—oh, it had been disgraceful! She sprang up and took a hasty turn through the room.

Well, at any rate, he had done her one service; she knew her own mind now. She drew a chair to the table and began to write.

An hour later Madame Malaxa came into the room, an

unposted letter in her hand which she had just taken from the rack in the hall. Her hands were trembling as she held it up.

"Clare, is this to recall Geoffrey?"

"No, mother."

"Then why write? You know I wrote yesterday to tell him of our arrival."

"I feel I have no business to keep him looking forward to what I can never do. I have written to ask him to put me out of his mind. I am sick of indecision."

"Oh, Clare, why will you be so headstrong?" She sat down and burst into tears—the piteous, slow-trickling tears of old age. Her daughter knelt on the floor and put her arms round her.


"Mother, don't, don't! You will break my heart."

"You are breaking mine. And all for a caprice that you will be sorry for afterward. You fancy, I suppose, that you are not in love; but you are eight-and-twenty, and you have always prided yourself on your calm temperament. Is it likely that you will experience the raptures of a girl just out? You say it is a sacrifice; well, you are not asked to make it, or even to promise to make it by and by; all you are asked to do is to wait. Not many men would be so patient."

"I know it, and I hate to take advantage of it."

"You are doing nothing of the sort. If he chooses to promise himself that in spite of your reluctance, which you made no secret of, he will propose to you again a year and a half hence, that is his affair. You need not hurl another refusal in his face."

Clare looked doubtful, and her mother went on: "At any rate, grant me one thing,—to me who have devoted myself to you, and never crossed you in anything,—keep that letter back. How can you tell what you may feel a year hence?"



XXVI.

THAT winter the Finkenwiese saw less of Dahlmann than for a long time past. His feet seemed to have lost their old habit of turning down there in the dusk of November afternoons or on the off evenings. Madame Malaxa certainly invited him seldomer, and when he was asked he usually had some excellent reason for being unable to come. Clare was used to these breaks in their intercourse; there had been several such in the six years of their friendship; yet somehow this time she seemed to take it to heart more than ever before. She missed him with an aching sense of loneliness and need, and wearied herself with speculations whether he kept away from dread of gossiping tongues, or because he had ceased to feel the same pleasure in coming as of old. Men did change, and why not Ehren? Perhaps he regretted his advice to her and the self-betrayal it involved, and wished her to forget it; but the idea only made the remembrance cling to her mind more obstinately.

They met, of course, almost daily at the theater, and he called on the Countess occasionally, just often enough to make his staying away unremarkable; but Clare's acute senses were quite aware that on these inevitable meetings he was keeping strict guard over himself; it was not her true comrade and friend, but the somewhat stiff and formal Herr Dahlmann that the outside world knew. Sometimes a furious anger against him surged up in her mind. It was an affront, an insult to the purity of their friendship, that he should seem afraid of her or need to be so upon his guard.

She told herself that she was growing morbid, and when the long-delayed frost brought the skating she flung herself into her favorite distraction with more than her wonted zest. She seldom encountered him now upon the ice; he had taken to going down in the early mornings before work began, and he could have the river almost to himself, and her usual time was in the afternoon, after rehearsal. It did her good; the keen, sharp air braced her; the rhythmic, swift movement dulled thought and made her better able to bear the thousand and one pin-pricks of the evening. This winter she seldom went to the lake, where the band played and the fashionable world disported itself. She preferred the river, which was sometimes almost deserted, where she could have room to practice the intricate figures in which she delighted without the risk of collisions. Solitary she need not have been even there; plenty of people would joyfully have forsaken the gayety of the lake for the honor of taking the first soprano for a turn, but she would none of them, and she could be very repellent when she chose.

She rarely skated when she had to sing in the evening. She was too careful of her reputation to risk being tired or hoarse; but one afternoon when she was on for Senta in the "Flying Dutchman" she had walked down to the river with Lili Rühling, her new understudy, who had succeeded Lotta Schmidt, now gone to shine on her own account in a sphere of less magnitude than Blankenstadt—not meaning to skate, but out of pure good-nature to keep that young woman out of mischief. For Lili was one of those clinging souls who must always have some one to lean upon. She had an unbounded admiration for "her chief," as she called her, and understudied her in everything, skating included. Clare had never been much given to enthusiastic friendships with other women, but she could not but respond to her junior's affectionate-

ness, and had taken up an almost motherly attitude toward her. Just now she was more than usually anxious to play chaperon, for Frau Rauch, now finally shelved, had been succeeded by a loud, fast woman from Stettin, who quickly gathered a rowdy set about her, and seemed disposed to draw Lili into the toils. There was not much love lost between the two leading sopranos, and it was commonly reported that Madame Blavinsky considered herself entitled to more youthful and important parts than those assigned her, so Clare did not care to lay herself open to the charge of jealousy by uttering warnings, and confined herself to extending the ægis of her own dignity and stand-offishness over her friend whenever she had the opportunity.

On this occasion she would not go upon the ice herself; but, having seen her companion safely launched in Armbrecht's care, she began to look about to see whether there were anyone there in whose charge she might safely leave her. The river was unusually crowded, for it had been a long frost and the surface of the lake was so cut up that most skaters had forsaken it for the flooded margin of the river, which was renewed again and again. It was not at all cold, and she made up her mind to stay a little. Lili's enthusiasm for skating was not very ardent, and she would most likely soon be tired. It was quite pleasant, strolling up and down in the mild air. It was late February, and a thaw might be expected at any moment now. Indeed, it almost seemed as if the ice only held out from long habit, for there was hardly any feeling of frost in the air. The sky was flecked over with tiny cloudlets, sure sign of an imminent break, and the ground began to look dark in patches. As she faced south, up the bend of the river, a soft, strong wind blew up against her cheek. It was so quiet and sweet; she walked on for some distance, leaving the crowd behind

her, till far off among the upper reaches, above the tall rushes and brown alder-beds, she caught sight of a certain lofty head and broad shoulders that there was no mistaking. She came to a sudden stand. He knew, of course, that she would not be likely to be there when the "Flying Dutchman" was down for the evening. To her sharpened senses it did look very much as if his staying away on other afternoons had reference to her. Well, he need not have been afraid of her; she was going home almost immediately. Yet why? If he chose to avoid her that was his affair; she was not going to shape her course to accommodate him. Still she turned and walked slowly back to the spot where the chairs, Dienstmänner, and people putting on or taking off their skates most did congregate. She arrived just in time to receive Lili returning from her excursion.

"Oh, Clare," she cried, "I am ready to die with the pain in my feet, and I believe I have got a chilblain! I really must come and have my skates taken off."

Clare had looked back a moment ago, and fancied Dahlmann saw her. She did not want to appear to take hasty flight.

"Rest a minute. You will be all right when your feet are warm. Sit down and put them upon the rail of a chair. It does seem a pity you should leave off so early this afternoon, for it is so near the end of the season; I am sure it will not last much longer."

At that moment she became aware that someone was speaking to her from the ice just behind.

"Won't you come for one turn with me, right up to the far end? There is some splendid ice up there; it has not got so cut up."

She hardly turned her head. "I am not skating this afternoon, thanks; I have to sing to-night."

"I know. But just for a few minutes; it could not

hurt your voice. And we shall not get much more of it."

"True; but I have no skates."

"Oh, but do use mine," put in Lili. "I was just going to take them off and rest. They will fit you; our feet are nearly the same size."

She wavered an instant and looked up at him, and then the feeling she had been nursing against him suddenly melted away, and she knew she longed for nothing so much as for this that she was trying to refuse. After this long famine to sweep once more, almost without her own volition, in those wide swinging paces that she loved, leaning against the strength of his arm in restful security, up to where the ice lay like dark mirrors under the trees. If she could go off alone with him for even a few minutes, away from all this crowd of tiresome, inane people, perhaps she might get to understand the meaning of this weary winter.

"You will come?"

He was looking so strong, so handsome, so masterful in a great Russian coat with a fur collar, and evidently bent on having his way. He had been very rigorous with himself, very self-denying all winter, and now he meant to have one little half-hour's indulgence.

"Yes, I will come."

He stooped to unloose Fräulein Rühling's skates, but an officious Dienstmann was beforehand, and, having taken off his heavy overcoat, he stood watching the skaters while he waited. Clare, too, was silent. Time enough to talk when he and she should have swung away together into the fairyland beyond those trees. Suddenly Lili shrieked.

"Just look! One of those mad English has gone on to the middle. It must surely be an Englishman; no one else would be so rash. Oh, he'll be drowned; he'll be

drowned! I can't look; it is too shocking!" and she hid her eyes.

It should be explained that the skating took place not on the river itself, which was never frozen quite over, but on the broad flooded margin, where the autumn overflow formed a long series of shallow pools. Hardly within the memory of man had the swift, strong current been wholly bound, but broad sheets of ice formed on each side, sloping almost imperceptibly to the rushing torrent that tore, dark and rippling, through the center. To venture on this part was of course strictly forbidden; but the English, with their natural antipathy to the observance of rules, more especially of rules laid down by the authority of any country but their own, did occasionally attempt to evade police regulations.

Following Lili's pointing finger, Clare perceived a boyish figure alone on the river, darting along with the rapidity of an arrow, at whom everyone was wildly shouting confused and contradictory directions. Then something heavy and soft was thrust suddenly into her arms, and she found she was holding Ehrenfried's coat, while he was speeding away, already many yards distant.

Still holding it, she set off to run across the ice, heedless that she had no skates on and her boots were slipping and sliding at every step. She never looked back at poor Lili, who was nailed to her chair, with one skate on and one off, nor thought of throwing her burden to her. In a moment she had reached the narrow embankment that separated the river from the skating ground, just in time to see that Ehren had missed intercepting the flying figure, and must either give up the attempt to rescue him or follow his mad career. Whether the boy had lost all control of his pace, with the slope of the ice and the strong southerly wind behind him, or whether he had given himself up to reckless enjoyment of the in-

toxicating speed, ignorant of the gulf to which he was drawing momentarily nearer, he paid no heed to Dahlmann's voice, urging him to wheel to the left and skate up to the bank. There was only one thing to be done; the rescuer redoubled his own pace, caught up with him, swooped below him, and, catching him by the arms, sent him with a tremendous impetus toward the bank. -The boy staggered, almost lost his footing, regained it for a yard or two, and stumbled forward among the rushes in safety. A shout went up as the crowd rushed down to help him to his feet. But Ehren himself? The push which he had given reacted; the recoil was too great on the sloping glassy surface where was no foothold. He threw himself on his knees, but it was too late; heavy as he was, he could not stop himself, and before the watcher on the bank could cry out his head vanished under the dark water.

There was a rescue station not far below, but the current was so hideously swift it would carry him far beyond the reach of help if they were not quick. Almost unconsciously she was sending down her voice in piercing shrieks, though she was much too far off for them to be heard. For an instant his head appeared above the surface, far, far below. Oh, would no one do anything! But signals more sure to carry than a woman's despairing cries had been sent, and her straining eyes could see a ladder being carried down and pushed across the current like a bridge. She kept running on; but how her feet guided themselves through the roughness and slipperiness of the path seemed a miracle, for her eyes were fixed on the black dot that appeared and vanished and appeared again in the middle of the stream. Oh, that she had had her skates on! He was so far off; she had lost sight of his head now. Then someone—two men—were crawling out upon the ladder, but they were so slow,

and he traveled so fast. And now the crowd closed round, and she could see nothing.

There was a great shouting and cheering. He was safe, then. She stood still a moment, leaning against a paling. She had almost reached the rescue station, only there were so many people round she could not make out where he was. She tried to ask them whether he was hurt, but she had no more power to frame a syllable than one has in a dream. The sensation was like the eve of waking from a horrible nightmare, and in another moment the waking came. The crowd parted, and Ehrenfried stood there, shaking the water from his yellow head and dripping like a great Newfoundland dog. He came straight to her, and took both her hands into his wet ones.

"I have frightened you," he said. "I am so sorry, but there was nothing else to be done. And we lost our turn together."

She looked up at him, and for an instant her face was convulsed; her knees seemed to fail under her, and she heard his voice as it were a great way off, saying, "Hold her up, Max. I am too wet to touch her."

Lortzing took the coat from her and held her arm to steady her; but she shook him off, though she could not speak. She must not let herself break down or cry or sob before all these staring people. Ehrenfried was still holding her hands, or she was clinging to his in a convulsive grip. Then Armbrecht's voice came on her other side—"Miss Arrowsmith, let me take you home. We must not let him stand another instant in his wet things."

She loosed his hands then and found her voice. "Of course; do hurry! You are sure you are not hurt?"

"Hurt? Not a bit; only a little cold and wet."

"How could they be so stupid!" she cried; "not to take you in somewhere."

He laughed. "Oh, I did not want to be carried off, like an uncomfortable bundle, as the bystanders wished, and put into a strange bed. I shall soon run home and get into dry things. I have been dosed with brandy already."

While he spoke Max was stuffing him with difficulty into the fur coat.

"Do hurry!" he said. "Your teeth are chattering now like castanets."

"Now, Miss Arrowsmith," said Armbrecht, "I am going to take you into Fechter's and make you drink a glass of wine, and then you must have a droschky; you are not fit to walk."

"Nonsense!" she cried. "Do you suppose I am going to faint upon your hands like the heroine of an old-fashioned romance? We don't do those things nowadays; it has quite gone out." Then, as she detected a little smile at the corner of his mouth, she added, "Well, I suppose I did feel a little upset just now, but I don't think you can wonder."

"I don't wonder. I don't mind confessing that I felt a bit choky myself when I saw him come out of their hands all safe and sound. As to little Rühling, she went off in hysterics. If it had not been for her clinging to me and screaming, I should have tried to help get the ladder out. I ran down, but I was too late to be any use."

"Oh," she said, and in spite of her pride there was a break in her voice, "if they had all been too late!"

"If he had been insensible, they would have been. Mercifully, he is a very strong swimmer, and he was able to keep himself in the middle of the current, though now and then he was drawn under by the waves from the edge of the ice breaking over him. If he had come up under the ice and got stunned, it would have been all up with

him. He reached the ladder before the men got out upon it, and if he had not been able to cling to it he would have been carried down; as it was, he was too exhausted to pull himself up, and they had a great business to haul him out. He had wonderful pluck; he pulled himself together when he saw you, and got himself out of our hands. There now; you had better have taken my advice. I told you you were not fit to walk home."

For she was shivering, as though it was she who had been in the icy water.

"Now I am going to ask you to do one thing more for me," she said as they reached her door. "Will you come in and tell my mother all about it? She will be so anxious to hear everything, and I don't feel as if I could talk about it quite yet. Tell her my feet were wet and I have gone to my room."

No one expected to see Miss Arrowsmith appear as Senta that night, and Lili Rühling, as soon as she had recovered from her hysterics, had set to work to practice in momentary expectation of a summons to fill the part; but none came, and at the appointed hour Clare emerged from the hands of her dresser, well rouged and betraying nothing of all she had gone through except an unconquerable huskiness and trembling of the voice. She certainly was not in her usual form, neither was Herr Armbrecht, but the public were lenient, and the customary recall was not withheld. She courtesied her thanks for the undeserved and rather perfunctory plaudits without raising her eyes, and just as she was bowing herself away beneath the curtain that Armbrecht was holding back for her, a sudden enthusiastic burst of applause filled the huge theater, mingled with cries of "Dahlmann! Dahlmann! Hoch!"

"What is it?" she said; "is he here?"

"To be sure; didn't you see him in the stage box?"

"No! Was he here all the time?"

"Yes, but he kept himself in the background, and when I caught sight of him he signed to me not to say anything. I expect he will be rather vexed at this. It was one of those fellows in the parterre started it! I saw the English chaplain with a number of his pupils; most likely the lad whose life he saved was one of them. He leaned forward for an instant to look at you, and they caught sight of him and burst out. He well deserved the ovation, but he will hate it."

As Clare left her dressing room, muffled in her fur cloak, with her maid behind her, she saw Dahlmann waiting for her in the narrow, dimly lit passage.

"I was so ashamed of that uproar," he said. "I had no idea of it, or I wouldn't have come."

"You had no business to come; you ought to be in bed," she responded, as her hand clasped his and she felt how hot it was.

"I had not heard you in Senta for so long; and, besides, I wanted just to assure you I was none the worse. I meant to have been in time to get a word with you before you went on, but you never appeared; so then I thought I had best keep to the back of the box and not startle you. I can't compliment you on your performance, however," he went on with a tender look; "I don't think I ever heard you sing so badly."

She looked up at him; a sort of flicker crossed her face, and her bright eyes were misty. "I know I did. Don't scold me! Could you expect me to sing properly after this afternoon?"

His fingers tightened on hers for a moment; then he dropped her hand and wished her good-night.

XXVII.

THE "Grüne Brillen" in the Spiegel Gasse was a favorite resort among the Blankenstadt singers for after-performance suppers. It was a regular old-fashioned Weinkeller. Other and newer establishments higher up in the town might eclipse it in the matter of gilding and mirrors; but those who knew the little suppers of Monsieur Delchoux knew when they were well off, and preferred its tarnished decorations with his French cookery to more modern and less satisfactory glories elsewhere. One night in early April a trio consisting of the Intendant, Herr Kapellmeister Kritzler, and a guest from Berlin were gathered round a small table on which a waiter, having just withdrawn the last dish, was placing a wax taper.

The Herr Graf, leaning back in his chair with the satisfied air of a man who has supped well and is at peace with mankind, said, as he loosened a button or two of his broad and ample waistcoat: "Well, Herr Klemm, and what do you think of our 'Tristan'? It went off tolerably, hey, Kritzler?"

"Admirably," said the visitor; "it was an ideal pre-
sentment. You are lucky in your first tenor; it is not often you can get three such gifts together: voice, presence, acting; and with the soul of an artist."

The Intendant chuckled a little. "Hear that!" he said, nodding across to Kritzler. "What more would you have? Why, I was sent for to the royal box at the end, and his Imperial Majesty was good enough to ex-

press himself enchanted. In old days it would have been worth a diamond snuffbox to Dahlmann."

"Diamond snuff-boxes be d——d!" said the Kapellmeister. "I like a man who may be depended on when there are no diamonds in the air. He has not attended rehearsal twice these ten days."

"Oh, is he that kind of man? Spoilt, I dare say, like the rest of them."

"Not a bit of it," said Von Wenzel; "he has had a cough lately, and I confess we were all a trifle nervous lest he should break down before the festival; but I thought we could rely on his coming up to the scratch."

"The Herr Graf always stands up for him," remarked the other, "because he is his own invention; he discovered him among the mountains."

Herr Klemm laughed. "Ah, I remember, there was a romantic story. A sort of happy shepherd boy, wasn't he?"

"Nonsense! He was nothing more romantic than a schoolmaster. But he has been a great success, and now that Bayreuth has set its seal on him, I think I have a good right to be proud of him. Would you believe it, this fellow here wanted me to engage a new man for this festival at the eleventh hour—a young fellow who has his laurels yet to win!"

"Well," grumbled Kritzler, "as matters have turned out it is all very well, but I decidedly object to risks, and Dahlmann's understudy is too hopelessly behind him. This young Hänfling was singing here 'als Gast' last week, and what I wanted was that he should stay on the chance of singing Tristan before the Emperor if Dahlmann should fail us, as I fully expected he would. But he would not hear of it on those terms; he has had his schooling at that kind of thing in Vienna, and will only come as topsawyer. What I said was, 'Engage him

for this festival performance, and let Dahlmann stand aside.'"

"It is ill to swap horses crossing the stream. I should have been sorry to fall between two stools with this affair pending."

The Kapellmeister was obstinate. "You may be glad to fall back on him yet. Dahlmann has worried me more than enough lately, though I admit he generally rises to an emergency."

"And but seldom falls below himself. I grant he has been a little uncertain this winter, but such a performance as this night's puts me quite in heart again. Emergency or no, Hänfling will never give you the like."

"Perhaps not; but he is a sound, reliable man, and a thorough artist."

"Artist? Humph!"

"He may not be such an actor, but he has his voice under complete control, and he is thoroughly schooled in all the best stage traditions; his uncle would see to that."

"Oh, ah! he is a nephew of Pauli's, isn't he. Well, I don't feel disposed to take any steps at present. Ah, Armbrecht,"—as the baritone rose from a neighboring table and, having parted from the friend he had been entertaining, sauntered in their direction,—“will you join us? Allow me to present you to Herr Klemm, a power in the journalistic world, as I dare say you know.”

Armbrecht bowed and drew a chair to the corner of the table, while the visitor complimented him on his Kurwenal.

"The honors of the evening belong to Dahlmann and Miss Arrowsmith," he returned. "I don't know when I have heard either of them in better form. Dahlmann could not have surpassed that at Bayreuth."

"I hear, however, that your star is somewhat uncertain. If he should be supplanted here——"

Armbrecht was stooping over the taper to kindle a fresh cigar, the light flickering over his dark face. He looked quickly from one to the other.

"I should think after to-night those that have would hold," he said. "We shall hear no more of the green linnet. Who wants the linnet that has the nightingale?"

"Who talks about linnets?" asked the Intendant sharply. "Who has been babbling about this thing?"

The Kapellmeister shrugged his shoulders. "Not I, Herr Graf. It was not I who alluded to the matter to-night."

"Since the Herr Intendant takes the world into his confidence in the person of Herr Klemm," said Armbrecht, leaning back and puffing out a faint blue cloud, "he cannot wonder if rumors get about among the company. Still, I think Dahlmann would be rather amazed next Saturday if he learns from the *Berliner Wochenblatt* that he is about to be superseded, contract notwithstanding."

"I assure you the matter shall go no farther," said the journalist. "I see it is not ripe for a *communiqué*. In fact, I gathered that the notion was set aside."

"Of course, of course!" cried the Intendant irritably. "Herr Armbrecht, as you appear to have overheard some part of our conversation, and run away with a wholly false impression, I may as well explain to you that there is not the slightest intention of canceling Herr Dahlmann's contract. The management have, however, been considering whether it would not be well to add another leading tenor to the company, the rather as he has been so uncertain lately. You must admit that he is not to be depended upon as he used."

"I don't see that. Are we any of us made of iron? It is true he has not been well this spring. Most men would have knocked under and failed you; he never has."

"Better if he had, perhaps," grumbled Von Wenzel. "He does not take enough care of himself."

"He'll be all right now the warm weather has set in. The fact is, he has had a nasty cold hanging about him ever since that plunge into the ice."

The Kapellmeister was out of temper. "What right had he to do anything so foolhardy?" he cried warmly. "He ought to have left the icemen to do their own business; they had not tenor voices to be imperiled. He should remember that his throat is not his own; it is ours—the management's—the King's. He has no right to squander what other people pay him for for any fool of an Englishman who chooses to fling his life away in defiance of police regulations. Talk of contracts! If he loses his voice, his contract is so much waste paper."

"Lose his voice?" cried the Intendant. "What rubbish are you talking? After to-night, too! One thing does not seem to have struck you, Kritzler: if you lose him you lose the Arrowsmith; that is very certain."

"Her contract does not expire till after next winter."

"That may be, but, my good Kritzler, you know little of womankind if you think a contract has any morally binding force on a lady's caprices. After all, it resolves itself into a question of money. The fine is a heavy one; but if you offended her, it would be a case of money no object." The Intendant laughed.

Armbrecht rose and took his leave. He was vexed that Miss Arrowsmith's name should have been brought in, but felt he could not well take any notice. To excuse would have been to accuse her.

That evening's performance had been a critical one in more ways than one. A Grand-ducal wedding had brought a crowd of royal and imperial guests to Blankenstadt, and a week of festivities had just wound up with a

grand-opera night. For weeks past Dahlmann had been struggling against a cold and hoarseness, the result of his plunge into the river, and the unfortunate Intendant had been nearly distraught between his fear of a breakdown and his conviction that anyone whom he could put in the first tenor's place would be hopelessly inferior. Moreover, it was the Bayreuth Tristan whom the strangers all wanted to hear. The Kapellmeister, however, between whom and Dahlmann there had never been much love lost, had taken it into his head that it would be an admirable opportunity to introduce a *protégé* of his own, a nephew of the old first tenor, Pauli, who had been bred in the old-fashioned traditions he himself loved, and who, if never likely to surprise them by any outbreak of genius, would be, he fancied, more amenable to his authority. The triumph of the evening had been to him, therefore, something of a disappointment.

For it had been a brilliant triumph all through. Dahlmann had been nursing his voice for the occasion, and his recent hoarseness had entirely disappeared. Whether he was stimulated to unusual exertion by some knowledge of the threatening cloud, or whether he was inspired by Clare's magnificent acting,—for she too surpassed herself that night,—the result had been a beauty, a fire, which even the greatest singers only know on rare occasions, and which acted like a spell on all who sung with them, as well on all who listened. It was a night that would never be forgotten.

Contrary to their usual wont, Madame Malaxa and her daughter were entertaining a small party at an after-performance supper. Some American friends, who had shown them a good deal of attention the previous summer, had come on a flying visit to Blankenstadt to witness the wedding festivities, and were most anxious to meet some of the opera celebrities off the stage. Dahl-

mann, of course, was there; they had made it a special request that they should be introduced to the Bayreuth Tristan; Herr Armbrecht they were already acquainted with, but he had an engagement at the Grüne Brillen, as well as the Herr Intendant, who had been invited, but the Lortzings were there, and Lili Rühling and her father, and it was a fairly representative party. The Americans, at any rate, seemed delighted.

But Clare herself almost regretted her hospitality; the part of Isolde is at all times an exacting one, and to-night, for some reason, the strain had been intense. She hardly knew how to make the effort to smile and bear her part in the talk and reply good-humoredly to the innumerable interrogations of the visitors. She felt anxious, too, about her colleague, who sat at the other end of the table between her mother and one of the Boston young ladies, making little attempt to entertain his neighbor, and looking depressed, if not bored; eating almost nothing, and saying less. He certainly was not doing his duty by Miss Carolina Spilsby, leaving her entirely to the somewhat ponderous efforts of old Herr Rühling, who was upon her other side.

This arrangement scarcely contented the young lady, and presently, as supper was drawing to an end, she turned once more and brought her light artillery to bear upon her neighbor. She was a small, curly-headed, large-eyed person, who had cultivated and brought to perfection the naïve manner of the *enfant terrible*, which a certain type of American girl affects.

"I guess you can't talk English much, Herr Dahlmann; I'm not great at German myself, but I'm not shy; I don't mind trying, if you won't laugh at me."

In the palace of truth Ehren would have answered that the language did not exist in which he felt inclined to hold forth that evening, but courtesy compelled the

reply, "I am used to talking English, mein Fräulein, if you prefer it."

"I guess we should get on better; and, you see, I can't go back across the duck-pond and tell the folks I sat next Herr Dahlmann and never exchanged ten words with him."

He bowed. "I am flattered; but I am afraid as a rule *nîmes* are less entertaining off the stage than on it."

"What a side the man has," thought Miss Spilsby to herself; "he might almost be an Englishman!" Aloud she remarked: "Well, now, I shouldn't wonder if you feel beat. I should, I know. Do you know, you nearly made me cry to-night." She paused, expecting an expression of enthusiastic gratitude for this testimony to his powers, but as none was forthcoming, she pursued: "I dare say you think girls always cry; but I am not weepy; I never was. When I was at school madame used to take us twice a week to the opera to form our taste, and the other girls were always so mad with me because I would laugh at the deathbeds and love scenes. I didn't feel like laughing this time. Why, it was just as real! Say, don't you feel quite wicked, behaving so, and then sitting down to table with Isolde as if nothing had happened?"

The random words went in between the joints of his armor and woke again the writhing consciousness that he had been holding by the throat all the evening. A man of the world would have found some playful answer; he paused an instant as though he had received a slap in the face, and in that instant caught Lili Rühling's eye, fixed on him from the opposite side of the table with a curious expression. It brought the hot blood to his forehead in a rush; he was distressfully conscious of looking confused as he said gravely: "I think Wagner's music must give the dullest some capacity to realize the passion of the story."

"The dullest? Thank you; that is one for me, I suppose." Miss Spilsby's eyebrows went up.

He made no attempt to explain away the unintended rudeness of his words, but turned to Countess Malaxa: "Madame, have I your permission to open a window? The night is very warm."

"Do so, by all means; I think we shall all be glad of it. I am sure after your exertions you must be feeling the sudden heat."

He rose from the table, and, having set the casement wide, stood a few moments letting the night wind blow upon his forehead instead of coming back to his place. Almost immediately afterward Madame Malaxa made a move to the other room, and the guests began to disperse. When Clare came back from taking a final leave of her American friends at the door she found Dahlmann still lingering. Her mother drew her shawl up over her shoulders with a little shiver.

"Well, if the night air refreshes you young people, enjoy it by all means. I am too old to forget that April is not June." And she disappeared behind the *portière* of her little boudoir, where a small wood fire still burned.

Ehrenfried stepped out upon the balcony which overhung the blossoming trees of the Finkenwiese, and leaned upon the balustrade. The moon was low, hardly glinting through the branches, but the air was full of the lambent light which shone like silver on the leaves and caught the topmost sheaf of the fountain in a net of diamonds. Far down the dark alleys the tinkle of the water rose and fell. The soft breath of the night was heavy with perfume from the lilacs and daphnes below, just breaking into flower, mingling with the scent of Clare's mountain of bouquets which floated out from the window. He stood there without a word; the passionate

music he had just been singing was beating still in his brain—in his heart.

Clare followed him out, but she too stood silent; an unwonted shyness seized upon her; there was something strange in his manner to-night that oppressed her like a foreboding of coming trouble. Yet surely his unqualified triumph must have quite set at rest any question of rivalry which might have worried him. For, though nothing definite had been said, both he and she had known full well that such a question was in the air. She wanted to congratulate him, but when she looked at his half-averted face the words died on her tongue. The silence grew oppressive; she broke it with a commonplace query:

“Don’t you want to smoke? Shall I roll you a cigarette?”

“Not to-night, thanks.”

She drew back and seated herself in a low chair half within the window, and watched him. A whispering breeze got up and sighed shivering through the white poplars. Presently she felt that she could not bear it any longer.

“Is anything the matter, Ehren?” she asked, “or is it only that you are tired out?”

He lifted his arms from the balustrade where he had been resting them, and turned so as to face her. She looked like a shadow in the darkness, in her black lace dress, the faint moonlight just touching her face and the pallid roses—the roses which he had given her—tucked into the bosom of her gown.

“Tired? I am weary of my very life.”

He took a step nearer; and then suddenly he had thrown himself down beside her and buried his head in her lap, with a half-stifled murmur: “Oh, Clare, pity me a little; don’t repulse me! Let me forget, if only for a few minutes, how utterly wretched I am!”

For a moment she seemed stunned; she had known for long, yet would not know that he loved her. She had such absolute confidence in his honor, in his sense of right. Sooner the skies should fall than he should sin against their friendship, against her mother's hospitality, against his own duty. Some calamity must have overwhelmed him and swept away the barriers of self-restraint. She felt she had neither power nor will to repel him. She bent over him and laid her hand upon his hair, light as the rose leaves that fell from her dress as she stooped.

"Ehren," she breathed in an awestruck whisper, "what is it? What terrible thing has come to you to make you act so strangely?"

"Terrible? Aye, terrible indeed! The most terrible of all things: Love."

"Oh, hush!" she broke in. "You don't know what you are saying. Don't, don't say things which must separate us—must ruin our friendship forever!"

"Friendship! I have tried for a long while to wrap myself in that fallacy, and now it is blown to the winds."

There was a minute's breathless silence; then he went on:

"This life is killing me. I cannot bear it and keep silence any longer. I have been like a man with a mortal disease: he may go on hiding it for years, and think to ignore it, but it gets worse and worse, and at the last he must speak. I thought, fool that I was, that I was stronger than my love, that if I could hide it I could overcome it; as if there could be any hope for me in this life that I must lead, seeing you, hearing you, holding you in my arms as I have done to-night,—these arms forever empty of your real self,—mocked always by a hollow mimicry of love between you and me. This horrible stage love night after night to amuse a gaping

crowd, while my heart is dying for want of you—it is not possible—I cannot bear it!”

It was a minute before Clare could find breath to speak; her heart almost stopped beating. His head went down again upon her knees; but after an instant's struggle she tried to rally her forces and break through the spell that bound her.

“Ehren, you must go,” she said. “You are not yourself to-night. Go, and let us both try to forget the mad things you have said.”

He rose to his feet and stood a moment, half dazed. She too had risen from her chair, clutching the window frame beside her for support, for she was shaking in every limb. Then he came close, looked down into her eyes, and for one swift instant she felt his lips against hers.

She stood motionless where he had left her, until she heard her mother's voice.

“Are you there stil., Clare? I suppose Ehrenfried is gone. I thought I heard the door some time ago. My dear child, do come in; I want that window shut. Do you know how late it is?”

Mechanically Clare glanced at the clock as she re-entered. An æon might have passed, to reckon by her feelings: it was just twenty minutes since she and Ehrenfried had stepped out upon the balcony.

XXVIII.

ALONE at last! Clare had sent away her maid, and mechanically began to go through the usual routine of preparations, but it was no use. The stunned feeling was passing off; she flung down brush and comb, and sat staring at her own reflection as though it was someone whom she must question. What had happened to her? Why had she been so passive? Was it shame or indignation that had thrilled through her at the touch of Ehrenfried's lips? A shudder of fear ran over her, and she hid her face in her hands when she knew it had been joy. This was what it all meant then: those breaks in their friendship, those strangenesses, those sudden avoidances; they had been the disguises of a love he could not master. For a while conscience was stunned, and she sat on, knowing only that she had entered through the magic gate which till now had been closed to her, and which some never find their life long.

She flung herself on the bed at last, worn out rather with feeling than with thinking; for she could not think; and in the early dawn she fell into a brief, heavy sleep. Short as it was, it drew a thick black line between her and the passion of the night. Nothing was changed, yet all looked different in the sane, cold light of day. Fatigue gave her a good excuse to ask to be left quiet and have her tea sent up. This terrible thing must be faced without delay, and faced alone. It seemed easier to lie with her eyes hidden and think it out than to get up and dress and meet the common affairs of every day.

Her mother came in to see her. Strong as she was, it

was most unusual for her to lie late in bed. Madame Malaxa looked at her anxiously, thought she seemed overtaxed and irritable, and wisely left her alone. She drank her tea, and her mind began to clear, and she tried to look the matter calmly in the face.

Ehrenfried had told her that he loved her; he had kissed her, and nothing could ever be the same between them again. How little a kiss might mean with some people, but betwixt these two it was a matter almost of life or death! Miss Arrowsmith was not a woman whom any man had ever dared to approach with light gallantry, nor was Dahlmann capable of taking advantage of his position toward her. With him such a demonstration was the symbol of a love that would make or mar their lives, and, alas! in this case it could but be for marring. She knew now they were standing together on the very brink of a precipice.

And what next? Was all her life, her womanly pride, her resolve to show that her profession had dangers only for those who courted them—was all to be in vain? Was she, after her high professions, to find herself entangled in the meshes of a passion which could have no honorable issue, like those women she had pitied and scorned even more than she pitied? Would she be ready to fling herself down from her pedestal at his bidding? And would he ever ask her to?

She no longer tried to blind herself with the name of friendship. For long years she had been bent on proving to herself, if not to the world, that a pure, calm friendship was possible between a man and woman who were not free to form any closer tie. Whether she were right in theory or not, she had to confess that the exclusive, absorbing devotion that had grown up insensibly between them must be described by quite another name. Was it all at an end, then? Must she really tear him utterly out

of her life? Ah, not that, not that! She could not live without him; they must draw a sponge over last night—must be more self-controlled, more guarded—must get back somehow to those difficult relations in which they had stood toward each other of late, and which, in spite of the strain and misery of them, were at least more tolerable than parting.

Round and round went the same thoughts, beating themselves in upon her brain, till the bed grew unbearable, and she rose and dressed, looking as if she were just getting up from an illness, and only thankful that no rehearsal required her presence. Her mother was concerned to see her so unusually overdone, but had too much tact to worry her with questions, and went off to spend the afternoon with an old friend, feeling that solitude would probably be the best restorative.

Clare would fain have denied herself to visitors, but feared to exclude Dahlmann. She felt nearly sure he would come and knew she must see him. However she might decide to act in the future, another interview was imperative; it would be impossible to meet him to-morrow at rehearsal. Yesterday she would have said to the parlor-maid without scruple, "Admit Herr Dahlmann, if he calls; I am not at home to anyone else." To-day she could not do it.

She roamed restlessly about the room, wishing he would come, and then at the slightest sound ready to fly into her own room. She tried a book; but it was hopeless work; she had not the slightest idea what she read. Occupy herself she must, or she would go mad. She got out her writing case and set herself resolutely to writing some unimportant letters. She had written one or two when the sound of the electric bell brought her heart into her mouth; but close behind the servant followed Lili Rühling.

"My dearest Clare," she exclaimed, as she kissed her, "how ill you look! What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Do I?" said Clare wearily. "We had hard work last night, you must admit, and then it was so hot. Besides, it does not suit me to entertain visitors afterward. I plead guilty to a headache."

Perhaps she hoped by this admission to cut the visit short, but Lili settled herself in a low chair and pulled off her long *suede* gloves, as though she intended to have her talk out.

She began, of course, about the brilliance of Tristan and Isolde, which was in everyone's mouth that morning; and the wry faces the Kapellmeister and Pauli were making at the failure of their sinister predictions; but Clare seemed absent and uninterested, and she herself was evidently only circling about the subject that was occupying her own mind. Presently she began again:

"I came to ask your advice really. I want to know what you would think. Do you know Madame Blavinsky has been asked to sing in Paris at the Grand Opera for a week at Whitsuntide?"

"Has she?" said Clare indifferently; "rather she than I. It is the most unsympathetic audience in the world."

"Is it? But the question is this: she wants me to go with her as understudy; she knows the impresario and can arrange it with him."

With an effort Clare withdrew her mind from the contemplation of her own troubles to consider her friend's affairs. "Don't go," she said; "I wouldn't; it isn't worth it."

"Oh, Clare, think of Paris in May!"

"You will have plenty of chances of seeing Paris under better auspices than that. It really isn't worth your

while to go all that way 'als Gast' if you are not to sing, and you may depend upon it Madame will not indulge in any 'crises des nerfs' on that occasion. You will have nothing but the journey and a glimpse of Paris for your pains; for I conclude she isn't going to pay you?"

"Oh, no; not unless I should be required to sing; but then we mean to have tremendous fun."

"You asked me to advise you," said Clare; "but I suppose what you really want is that I should indorse your own opinion."

Lili laughed. "Well, I suppose that is what we generally do want when we ask advice; but the truth is, my foolish old daddy does not quite approve of it, and I thought if I could get you to view it in the proper light it would bring him round; he thinks so much of your judgment."

"Your daddy is right about this, Lili. You would be making a great mistake to accept—partly for professional reasons, partly because she is not a fit chaperon for you. Paris is very different from this quiet little place; you would find yourself thrown among a loud, fast set such as you have no experience of, and she would be worse than no good to you."

"I don't see why you should say that. I am sure she has plenty of knowledge of the world."

"Too much—of the seamy side."

"Clare, I do think as regards Madame Blavinsky you are very prejudiced and censorious."

"Am I? I don't think so."

"Well, what," persisted Lili, "do you definitely know against her? If you do know any distinct, provable thing I think you ought to tell me."

"I confess candidly that I do not," said Clare. "Her general reputation in the company does not stand high,

and you know yourself how little she cares for appearances."

Lili flushed. "I don't think that is fair," she said, "especially from you."

Clare's eyes dilated and grew dark.

"From me!" she said, and caught her breath.

Lili paled suddenly; she was frightened, but excitement made her go on.

"Yes," she repeated, "I mean it. I don't insinuate for one moment that there is anything wrong between you and Herr Dahlmann; I know you too well; but I do say, when you know the way that you and he have been talked of for years, and you do not care, but go calmly on your own way, it comes ill from you to refuse to believe another woman's innocence because she sometimes flies in the face of Mrs. Grundy."

Clare had risen to her feet and stood petrified, and Lili went on: "You cannot wonder that people who do not know you as well as I do, and whose minds always fly to the worst construction, should look upon him as your lover; but if you are indifferent to what is said of you, you might at least be more charitable."

What would Clare have given to be able to answer now as she would have answered boldly yesterday, "He is not my lover; he has never spoken a word of love to me." She stood there wrapped in one burning blush, like a Nessus mantle of stinging flame.

"What have I or he ever done to give anyone the right to use such a word of him?"

Lili quailed. "Oh, I did not mean that you had ever done anything," she faltered, "but anyone can see that he is in love with you, and—well, last night, I must say, he rather gave himself away."

"What do you mean?" cried Clare sharply. "Last night?"

"Why, it was after supper; I was sitting opposite to him, and that little idiot from Chicago was rallying him on his acting, and asking him if it was not dead earnest, or some such nonsense, and he——"

"Well, what did he say?"

"Oh, nothing; it was not what he said. He did not answer at all for a minute, and he looked so—so odd."

"Herr Dahlmann has no sense of humor; it probably took him quite a minute to see the point of an American jest. Your imagination is lively if you build accusations on such foundations as that."

Lili began to stammer an apology, but Clare cut her short.

"I don't want to hear another word about it," she said, goaded out of all endurance. "I believe you did not mean to insult me, and another time I may be able to meet you as if nothing had happened; but if you stay now I shall say things I shall be sorry for."

And Lili caught up her parasol and gloves, and simply fled.

Clare sat down again to her writing table, but not to write. Why had this come to her to-day of all days? It seemed as if everything were coming to a crisis. Could it be true, what Lili had said, that people spoke of Herr Dahlmann as her lover? Was it indeed she, Clare Arrow-smith, who had hedged herself about with coldness and stiff reserve, who had taken her stand upon an eminence quite aloof from all light, fast ways—was it she whose name was in all men's mouths? And worst of all, not undeservedly. The thought stung her. What a fool she had been when she fancied that last night might be ignored, and her friendship go on on the old lines! Angry as she was, she acknowledged that, after all, Lili had perhaps done her a service in flashing the dry light of the world's opinion on the position. She saw now plainly

enough that last night had changed everything: once put into words, they could never again face the world—face each other—with the old innocence. There must be no paltering with the situation.

She sat on, her elbows on the table, her forehead dropped into her hands,—how long she did not know,—till there was the sound of an opening door, and Dahlmann was standing before her, pale and grave.

She did not rise nor give him any greeting, and he, noticing the slight barrier of the table behind which she seemed to have entrenched herself, said curtly:

“You need not be afraid of me; I am in my right senses to-day.” Then, as she made no answer, “I came because I thought I should find you alone, and I felt it was impossible we should meet before others.”

“It would be best we should not meet at all—if that could be.”

“I want to know how I stand with you,” he went on. “I was carried out of myself last night; I betrayed myself. Can you forget it?”

“No.” Just that one word, breathed rather than spoken.

He smote his hands together with a despairing gesture. “Oh, that I should have to stand before you like a criminal, knowing that my love can only be an insult, an affront to you! For, understand,” he went on more clearly, “I am not come to ask for anything but forgiveness.”

“How can I forgive you!” she cried, starting to her feet. “I trusted you, and you betrayed me into a position that it shames me to think of!”

“I have deserved this; and yet—oh, Clare, you are unjust! Have I not tried in all possible ways to smother, or at least to hide, what I felt for you? Have I not made the last sacrifice of keeping away from you,

letting you think me estranged? What more could I have done?"

"And it has all been in vain." She wrung her hands. "Do you know what they say of us?"

"You used to care but little for what 'they said.' What has changed you? But I need not ask. You are angry because you are afraid; you are afraid because you love me."

The last words were said under his breath, but she caught them, and flashed out into indignation. "How dare you say that!" she cried. "What right have I given you? You took me so by surprise; you gave me no chance to—to——"

"You are right; I have no business to say it; and yet it seems to me as if the sorrow of parting—if it must be parting—would be less bitter if we acknowledged that we shared it. And, after all, what good are pretenses between us now?"

But Clare was stubborn; he should wring no admission from her. To refuse it seemed the one plank left to cling to in the shipwreck. Perhaps she realized more clearly than he did the exceeding peril in which they stood. She felt if she once said she loved him all was lost. Anger was her only defense against yielding.

"If they are pretenses," she cried, "I will have them respected! You think because, paralyzed as I was yesterday, I let you kiss me, that you may say what you will, but I will not have it."

"Oh, that we should stand like enemies, accusing one another! And I would lay down my life for you."

"You have left me no choice," she went on pitilessly, "but to break up everything here and go away."

"No, no! that must not be. I should feel myself the meanest hound alive if my conduct drove you away. If either of us must go, it must be me."

For a moment the antagonism in which she had steeled herself gave way when she thought what the step would mean to him. "Not you: it would never do for you to leave Blankenstadt now; it would be fatal to your career. Hänfling would step into your place, and, in spite of last night, you would leave under a cloud."

"I know it," he said bitterly. "Do you think I don't know how atrociously I have been singing lately? I don't suppose I could get another engagement if I broke my contract here—unless, indeed, I could trade upon my old reputation for a few months. But what does it signify?"

She looked at him, her eyes growing dark with repressed feeling. "Don't speak like that!" she said. "Your voice will be all right again in a few weeks; it was all right last night; but it is not a moment for you to make a change. And, then, I cannot forget that you have others dependent on you. And there is the fine."

"It is not only the question of fine. I don't like the notion of retracting my pledged word; still, if the management are dissatisfied with me, it may make it all the easier to come to an arrangement. I will do anything rather than feel that I have driven you away."

He spoke in the quiet tone of a man discussing business arrangements, and Clare's spirit failed. If he had pleaded with her for tenderness, for a confession of her love, she would have held firm, but this calm acceptance of the fact that all was at an end between them daunted her; her haughty manner fell away like a mask; she sank down upon the sofa, and, hiding her face in the cushions, began to sob.

A sort of spasm crossed his face as he looked at her, then he went to the window and stood a minute or two, looking out but seeing nothing. Presently, as her sobs continued, he came back and spoke in a low, hoarse voice:

"I am going, Clare; I cannot bear this. I promise you at least you shall have no further annoyance, and I must think what best to do." He moved toward the door, then stopped and turned back, his restrained manner breaking up for an instant. "Oh, my beloved one, God keep me from ever harming you!"

For a moment she fought with her sobs, then she choked them back and stretched out her hands to him, but the door closed, and she was alone.

As he left the house he stood still to collect himself, and wiped the damp from his forehead. He had conquered so far; he had retrieved his failure; but he knew that many more such victories would leave him bankrupt. He felt strangely ill, but hardly heeded it; if he was conscious at all of the weight on his limbs and the laboring of his breath, he attributed them to the strain of the last half-hour. He shrank from going straight home; he felt as if the struggle must have written itself on his face in visible traces, and he longed for some quiet place to take refuge in for a little while. As he passed up the street, the wide portals of the Picture Gallery seemed to invite him; he passed through the swing doors and up the shallow stairs, hardly conscious of what he was doing or why, till he found himself in a quiet corner, where he could lean back undisturbed, shading his eyes with his hand. At this time in the afternoon the gallery was nearly empty, and the few people who were there moved quietly round, absorbed in the pictures and making their comments to each other in an undertone.

Presently he let his hand sink, and his eyes rested on the painting facing him. It was one he knew very well, a Saint Rodriguez by Murillo. Though the painter was not, as a rule, a favorite with him, he had often paused before it to admire the marvelous texture and finish of the stole, and the fine, expressive drawing

of the saint's head; to-day it came home to him with a personal message. There are times of extreme tension when something often seen or heard before—a poem, a picture, a strain of music—unfolds some special meaning for us; either some touch of sympathy or some finger-post to point the way. The thought that came straight from the picture into Ehrenfried's mind was the reality, the momentousness of the eternal battle between good and evil, between darkness and light. Some words came into his mind—suggested, perhaps, unconsciously by the red gash round the throat of the martyr: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

This was no cloistered virtue, sequestered from the temptations that beset humanity; but the face was the face of a man who had suffered acutely, struggled passionately, and had overcome. The countenance was intensely human, with the record stamped upon it of ambitions conquered, desires trodden underfoot. He knew nothing of the legend, whatever it might be; but the picture told enough. It was part of the one great conflict, waged through all the ages, between human nature's demand for happiness, for gratification of its desires at any cost, and the nobler humanity which compels self-conquest.

It would be hard to say just how it helped him; but in some way it brought home to him that his own individual struggle against wrong was not an isolated conflict: the results of which mattered only to himself, but part of a great whole of an infinite consequence, and the knowledge strengthened him. Plainly as he knew on which side duty lay, there were not wanting whispers of special circumstances in his own case: suggestions that the love against which he fought was one that appealed to his higher, not to his lower nature; that all that was best in him came from the influence of the woman from whom he

must turn away; that since the laws of Blachsen made divorce so easy, he might find some cause to set himself legally free,—at the sole expense of honesty and self-respect,—the thousand and one reasons for yielding which buzz like gnats to distract a man from his purpose. For though the victory seemed just won, he was in truth still in the very crisis of temptation, for he knew to-day, as he had not known before, in spite of Clare's refusal to acknowledge it, not only that she loved him, but that he could if he willed it conquer her, bend her, make her his own. If he chose to be false to his own responsibilities, she would after a struggle, longer or shorter, make for him a woman's supreme sacrifice. Only his own will stood between him and the ruin of two women's lives. He might trample on the happiness of the one, and degrade the purity of the other—if he would.

His hand went up over his eyes again. He was not consciously praying; but as he sat there in the silence his soul was reaching up with wordless supplication to the Source of strength and righteousness.

Presently the guardian of the room tapped him on the shoulder. "Fallen asleep, sir? The closing bell rang some minutes ago; I want to lock up."

And looking round, he saw the rooms were empty and the lights being turned down.

XXIX.

THE Herr Kapellmeister was in a very bad temper. Graf von Wenzel, elated with the triumphs of the wedding week, had definitely broken off negotiations with Hänfling; had appointed a new opera for speedy production, with Dahlmann and Miss Arrowsmith, of course, in the leading parts; and had betaken himself to the Baths of Bittstein to repose a while upon his laurels.

The first rehearsal was about to take place, but where were the principal singers? Instead of Miss Arrowsmith arrived a note of apology, inclosing a doctor's certificate.

" 'Nervenanstrengung' indeed!" snorted Herr Kritzer, as he glanced through it. "I dare say. Temper more likely, because it was reported I wished Hänfling put on for first tenor. H'm, a week's rest—gone to Dandlau. Fräulein Rühling, I hope you are prepared to fill Miss Arrowsmith's part?"

Lili was equal to the demand, so far as the moon may be said to be equal to filling the part of the absent sun, and declared her readiness. But it was now twenty minutes past eleven, the overture had been played twice, and Dahlmann had not appeared. It was enough to make an irascible Kapellmeister use strong language.

"Where, zum Henker, can that fellow be?" he cried, bringing his baton down upon the desk with a rap that made the orchestra look up expectant. The stage-manager came to the front and leaned over.

"Would it not be well to proceed to the business of

the second act? Dahlmann does not come on till scene iv. in that. We are only losing time."

At the same moment the call-boy was seen pushing his way through with a note, which had just been brought by a messenger. It was handed up to the conductor's desk.

"What, another doctor's certificate?" asked Dragenz, coming to the edge of the footlights. But the paper Herr Kritzler unfolded contained only a few words scrawled hastily in pencil: "Very sorry I cannot come this morning. Hope to be all right to-night; but please make arrangements, in case I fail."

"Arrangements, forsooth! And he knows his understudy is gone to a funeral. Herr Lortzing, we must look to you."

"Impossible! I am quite unprepared. I have not understudied Dahlmann these two years. I don't object to taking his part to-night, if you like; but I could not attempt this new thing. Why, I have not even heard it!"

Max Lortzing was one of those singers gifted with voice and ear, and yet with an absolute incapacity for grasping written music; he always had to be taught his parts like a performing bullfinch. Meanwhile the buzz of comment was running round, as the contents of the note were passed from one to another.

"How very odd! I hope there's nothing wrong, I'm sure," said Fräulein Brenner.

"Wrong? Oh, you mean—well, it is a queer coincidence, certainly."

Frau Pappelheim, who was filling a vacancy in the chorus that morning, was appealed to for her opinion. She shook her head, and pursed up her mouth with the air of one who knows more than she cares to reveal. "Oh, don't ask me!" she said.

Herr Ambrecht was standing in the wings not far from

the group of whisperers. He could hardly catch what was said, but he noticed a glance of intelligence here, a laugh there, with a shrug or a raising of the eyebrows.

Max was speaking to the Kapellmeister. "You may rely on it Dahlmann has forgotten Grün's absence, and thought he would nurse his voice a bit; he was rather done up after Tristan. I'll step down to his house and tell him he must come and just run through the part; he needn't exert himself."

"Why not send a call-boy?" said Dragenz. "And you could go on till he came."

"Not a bit of use; but if I go myself I can explain matters."

Armbrecht followed him into the passage and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Urge him just to come round and show himself, even if he isn't well enough to sing," he said. "I don't know whether you heard what those idiots were whispering just behind you."

"Why, you don't think it possible?"

"Possible! Of course not, you fool! Only it always does mischief to let such reports pass current for half an hour. People remember that such and such things were said, and forget they were said falsely."

Max sped off on his errand. The dining room and sitting room at the Dahlmanns' flat opened into one another, and he saw at a glance that Ehrenfried was not there. Frau Dahlmann was lying back in a rocking chair close to the stove, although the day was warm, attired in her usual morning *négligé*, with a large basket of mending beside her and a novel in her hands.

"Is your husband gone out?" he asked hastily.

She looked up from her book with a dreamy gaze, surprised at the interruption.

"Yes, I think so." Then as Max's eyes began to grow

round: "Oh, I forgot; he came in again. He started for rehearsal and then came back; he said he didn't feel very well. I think he is gone to lie down. I will call him."

"No, don't trouble; I'll go in if I may." And Hedwig lost herself once more in the trials of "Die Zweite Frau."

There was no answer to his knock, so he opened the bedroom door and went in. Dahlmann was lying back upon the pillows half-dressed, his eyes wide open, yet seeming to see nothing. He had thrown off coat and collar, and the neck of his shirt was unbuttoned, showing the massive, hairy throat, as though he felt oppressed; one muscular hand and arm hung limp over the edge of the bed; he lay as if he had dropped there rather than disposed himself to rest. Max went up to him.

"What is the matter, old fellow; are you ill?"

The voice roused him. "I don't know; I suppose I am. I feel very queer."

"You do look bad. Have some brandy. Look here; do you think you could possibly pull yourself together and come round for an hour just to sketch in your part in this new piece? Grün is away—gone to his father's funeral, don't you remember?—and we are all at sixes and sevens."

"Oh, poor Grün! I had quite forgotten."

"Well, will you try? I can't possibly take it at sight. You needn't really exert yourself, you know."

"I don't believe I can stir. Besides, I can't seem to remember anything about it. It was that new thing, wasn't it? I don't know whether I looked at it. Can't it be changed?"

"Of course it ought; but Kritzler is in such a wax; he has got an obstinate fit on, and I believe he will telegraph for Hänfling back if you don't show yourself. Don't let that little beast get his hoof in."

But even the threat of a rival had no effect, and the eyes were lapsing into the same fixed, vacant stare. Lortzing tried his last shaft.

"It would be better for other reasons if you could just put in an appearance. You know, Miss Arrowsmith has gone away suddenly, and——"

"What!" cried Ehren, and raised himself on his elbow.

"Why, didn't you know? Only to Dandlau for a week's rest. It seems she cracked up too after Isolde; but the point is that—well, I really am ashamed to tell you the absurd report that has got about; but, for her sake, if you could let yourself be seen it would be as well."

Dahlmann reared himself up without a word, and, after sitting still a moment with his head against the bed-post, walked unsteadily over to the looking-glass.

"Well, I don't look a very desirable object, I must say," he remarked. "However, I dare say a comb and a clean collar will do something. It will get about that I have taken to drinking next."

He began to look for what he wanted with uncertain, shaking hands, while Max fussed round, alternately encouraging and begging him to desist from the attempt. Presently, as he put up his hands to fasten his collar, he reeled and would have fallen, had not Max, with his actor's adroitness, caught him and got him on a chair.

"You must let me help you back to bed; I can see it is no use; Kritzler must give in."

But Ehrenfried now was doggedly bent on going through with it. The one idea that he had grasped, that the effort had to be made for Clare's sake, held him to his purpose. "Nonsense!" he said. "I shall be all right when I get into the air. Just help me on with my coat, and I am ready."

He tried hard to shake off the mists that seemed to

close him in, but could not rid himself of the conviction that he was in reality still lying on his bed, and only dreaming that he was driving through the streets and mounting the stairs at the theater. He heard his own voice as though it were another's apologizing for his late arrival, and trying to explain that he had forgotten the absence of his understudy. They had been going through detached portions till he came, and he was hustled on at once, as the Kapellmeister was bent on running through the whole work before they dispersed.

The scene opened with a duet between Armbrecht and Sophie Brenner, and Dahlmann noticed that they were both looking at him with anxious and compassionate eyes, and he wondered at it. His cue came, and Armbrecht whispered something to him, but he could not hear; his eyes were fixed on the great empty space before him; only to him it was not empty, but crowded with strange faces, mocking and mowing at him. The conductor looked at him with raised baton, then signed to the orchestra to play the preceding bars again. He tried to draw a breath, but it seemed to go through him like a knife. He made an effort to stammer out some words of excuse, but it was as though he had entered into a furnace and was ringed round with pain alone, though he was dimly conscious that they were all crowding about him, that someone had got a chair, and Armbrecht was holding him. He heard a confused babel of voices: "What a fool you were, Max, to bring him out in this state!" "Go for Zornlinn, someone, will you?" "Here, get a droschky, quick—a closed one, mind!" Then the ring of fire closed in, and he hardly knew what happened till he was back on his bed, fancying all had been a dream.

Two days later the Intendant, who had returned from Bittstein in a hurry, encountered Dr. Zornlinn just com-

ing away from his patient's house, whither he himself was turning his steps.

"So," said the doctor, stopping short at the sight of him, "so, Herr Intendant, you must needs try to kill your goose with the golden eggs!"

"What do you mean?" cried Von Wenzel sharply; "kill him! He is not——"

"He is not dead, no; nor, I trust, not like to die. I did not mean it literally, but so far as the golden eggs are concerned, you'll get no more this season, or I am much mistaken."

"Is his voice affected?"

"Pooh! Ask if a man's voice is affected when he is down with pneumonia! I suppose you came to inquire if he could get up and sing Tristan for you to-night?"

"Why, Herr Doctor, to hear you, one would think I had sent him into the river to rescue that young fool, who I wish had been at the bottom sooner. For, I understand, that was the cause of the disaster."

"Primarily, no doubt. It was not only the chill, but he must have given his heart a terrible wrench in trying to draw himself up on the ladder in his numbed condition. If he had laid by at the time, and taken reasonable care of himself, serious mischief might have been averted."

"Well, and do you suppose he could not have had leave by asking for it?"

"I dare say, with Kritzler's man in the background ready to supplant him if he faltered. Of course he clung to his work like grim death, and what with work and worry, in his lowered state, a slight chill brings on this violent attack of inflammation, and there he is."

"You'll pull him through, Doctor?"

"I shall do my best, you may rely on it, for my own credit's sake, and for his, rather than to save the management a loss."

"You are very savage this morning, Herr Doctor, and I am afraid that means that you are anxious."

"Anxious? Well, yes, I own it. The pneumonia alone I could subdue, but besides the state of his heart, there are rheumatic complications that bother me."

"But he has a splendid constitution; I have heard him say he has never had a day's illness in his life."

"Aye; but do you know the sort of people who get through bad illnesses? Women and sickly folk. These exquisitely balanced organizations resent illness, and not seldom slip out of the world to escape it."

Clare Arrowsmith had thought she knew what misery was when her strong nerves had broken down under the strain of loving and denying, and for the first time in her life she had shrunk from her public and her work. She had fled to Dandlau with the feeling that if she could but put a short break between her and the meeting she dreaded, she would be better able to gather her forces and behave with courage and self-control. But when the news of his illness followed her, she felt that all the armor of her soul had been taken from her. To think of him lying suffering, lonely, sick to death perhaps, tore her pride to shreds. Her anger was all drowned in tears; she felt as though her respect for the barrier between them, her proud resolve to maintain her own integrity, were all being swept away in the tide of passionate pity—of anguished longing.

Both she and her mother would have given anything to return to Blankenstadt at once, but neither would say so. Madame Malaxa loved Ehrenfried well, and felt almost as anxious as if he had been a son of her own; but she had had her apprehensions lately, and the suffering which Clare's repressed manner could not hide quickened them. Moreover, if, as she suspected, gossip was afloat, a sudden impulsive return was the last thing to be allowed. So

they endured the week, and lived on the daily bulletins in the papers. When they did get back it was remarked that Dandlau did not seem to have done much for Miss Arrowsmith.

Once in Blankenstadt, however, they could at least have direct news of him, and Clare went herself and asked to see Frau Dahlmann. To content herself with a mere inquiry at the door, to gather from chance gossip at rehearsal next morning all that her heart hungered to know, was impossible to her. She shrank from seeing Hedwig; the slightly contemptuous feeling she had had for her had changed in these days to a bitter envy; yet how could she satisfy herself with a servant's report? As well go on gathering news from the *Tägliche Lauscher*.

She took a basket of grapes, and sent them up with Madame Malaxa's love and sympathy. Would Frau Dahlmann see her a moment?

The maid showed her in and left her in the salon, which had the cold, neglected look a room quickly gets when there is illness in the house—a sort of silent witness that the center of interest is shifted to another place. She had time to observe the dead flowers in the vases and the rim of dust round each book on the table before Hedwig came in, looking wan and disheveled, her hair slipping down, the bodice of her dress replaced by a loose jacket with no collar. For a moment the two women stood greeting one another before a tall mirror between the windows, and Clare, exquisitely dressed and finished at every point, as she always was, in the spring freshness of a green costume with a bunch of sweet violets nestling against the cream lace and white satin of her jabot, felt a pang of envy as she looked at the one who had the right to appear with untidy dress and uncurled hair, while she must anoint her head and wash her face as though the life or death of the man she loved

were nothing to her. Was Hedwig indeed suffering one tithe of the anxiety which gnawed her own heart? She at least could be with him every hour to give him comfort.

Hedwig's glance, too, caught the contrast in the glass, and she began hastily to apologize for her own unkempt appearance; but Clare cut her excuses short.

"Is Herr Dahlmann worse?"

"No, oh, no, thank you; in some ways he is better; the inflammation is subdued, and he is not in nearly so much pain now; still, the doctor says he does not get on as he ought; I don't know why, I am sure. He has never been ill before, and it seems so strange and miserable." Two tears trickled down her face, and she wiped them with the loose sleeve of her jacket.

Clare looked coldly at them. "They are for herself, not for him," she thought. Aloud she said, "You must forgive my intruding on you; we have been away, you know, and my mother—we both were so anxious to hear about him." She stopped; the thousand and one questions her heart hungered to ask seemed an impertinent intrusion. "I will not keep you away from him. Do let us know if there is anything we could do!" She moved toward the door.

"I don't think there is, thank you. Minnie Pappelheim is very kind, and some of the singers come and sit with him." Then a sudden thought came to her. Dr. Zornlinn had said that morning that it would be good if the patient could be roused or interested; the disease was subdued, but there was a disquieting lassitude and lack of rallying force. Miss Arrowsmith had always interested and amused him; Hedwig knew that, and, goaded by Frau Pappelheim, had seen in her a dreaded rival. But such thoughts seemed to have slipped into the background. He was all her own now; she could

afford to be magnanimous. "Would you like to see him?" she said. "He does see a few people now and then, and it might do him good. Will you wait one moment while I ask him?"

Clare had neither time nor power to make any demur. She trembled from head to foot. Would she be able to hold herself still, to look at him calmly, however changed he might be, and express just a fitting sympathy and concern, his wife standing by? Would it be good for him to see her? Might it not torture both him and herself? Yet for one moment's sight of him she was ready to go through fire and water.

She stood waiting in the narrow entry between the doors. Hedwig had left that of the bedroom ajar behind her, and Clare could just hear a low spoken sentence ending—"if you would care to see her." Then the sick man's voice, husky, yet louder than she would have expected—"No, no, no!" with an irritated emphasis.

She was white to the lips when Hedwig came out, closing the door behind her.

"He is so sorry; he is not quite up to seeing anyone to-day. Another time, perhaps."

"He is quite right," interrupted Clare in a hard, metallic voice. "I always think it is such a mistake for sick people to see visitors. I would not have let you ask him, if I had had time."

The passage was dark, but, without seeing her face, Hedwig was conscious of the change of tone. Perhaps she had overheard Ehrenfried's curt refusal and was offended.

"I am afraid it seems very rude and ungrateful—after those lovely grapes, too," she said; "but sometimes in the afternoon he gets feverish and not quite himself. You won't mind?"

Mind! And he would think she had offered a visit;

for he would never guess that his wife had proposed to bring her in, and had moreover given her no time to refuse. She recalled their last miserable parting and his words, "I ask you for nothing but forgiveness." He had resolved to have done with her, and she had seemed to thrust herself upon him. Oh, agony of humiliation! And then came the bitter thought that perhaps he would die, and that "No, no, no!" be the last word she should ever hear him speak.

And meanwhile Ehrenfried turned his face to the wall, and the tears which his weakness could not hold back forced themselves between his eyelids.

XXX.

SLOWLY, slowly the days dragged by, and Clare listened with an unmoved face to the daily bulletin: A little better—not quite so well; and every morning saw her in her place at rehearsal, taking no part in discussions of the latest reports, and apparently indifferent to the speculations which were rife as to the probable recovery of the tenor. Dahlmann had never been a popular member of the company, but everyone was interested about him now. And still when evening came she could hold her great audience spellbound by the passionate tragic intensity of her acting, though her voice sounded strained, sometimes almost harsh. Of the cost at which she went through it—of the nights she spent walking up and down her room, or lying exhausted on the floor—not even Madame Malaxa knew.

“I never in my life,” said Max Lortzing, “met with a girl so utterly heartless as Miss Arrowsmith. I used to like her,”—oh, Max!—“but I confess it disgusts me. We all know that poor dear Dahlmann worshiped the ground she trod on, and yet she hardly shows the slightest concern. She is an icicle. Why, there was one morning when they scarcely thought he would have lived out the day. I know she knew it, and I heard that hard little laugh of hers more than once.”

“Miss Arrowsmith’s voice is certainly magnificent,” was the verdict of Herr Hänfling, “but she is a singularly unpleasant person to act with. English manners, I suppose; but she need not be afraid of me, I can assure her.”

One morning Clare had started rather early for rehearsal, and as she went up the central alley of the Finkenwiese, she saw Herr Armbrecht sauntering as though waiting for someone, and as he caught sight of her he quickened his steps. Her heart almost stopped beating, for the idea flashed across her mind, "He is dead, and Armbrecht has come to tell me!". She hastened on, though her knees failed under her. "Would he be smoking if the worst were true?" whispered Hope. "Yes, of course; men always smoke, whatever happens," answered Despair.

When they met she was speechless. He took her hands and read her agonized question in her eyes; for him she had not put on her stony mask. "It is all right," he said; "don't look so frightened. He is better. I thought you would like to hear about him before going to the theater. There is plenty of time. Send your maid on, and come and sit on this bench a moment."

In truth, she could hardly stand and, signing to Babette, who was carrying her music, that she might go on, she let him lead her to a seat a little off the main alley, screened by thick bushes of red-flowering currant. The pungent, spicy odor would always recall to her that intolerable moment of stress—the meeting of two currents of dread and relief that overwhelmed her. Had her companion been anyone else, she could hardly have maintained her hold on herself, and with Armbrecht she felt safe; it was not the first time she had broken down before him, and his quiet assumption of her interest seemed to loosen the iron bar she had put across every expression of feeling. She turned a little away from him, and, bowing her head on the back of the bench, gave way to a flood of tears. He sat quietly beside her, and let her have her cry out, only now and then patting her shoulder with his broad hand in quite a fatherly way.

"There is nothing to cry about," he said presently; "he is really better; he has had a splendid night, and this time I think he has turned the corner in earnest. I stayed till the doctor came, and he confirms my good opinion; he talks of letting him get up for half an hour this afternoon."

"How foolish I was!" murmured Clare, beginning to recover the power of speech; "but I thought——"

"Yes, I saw you did. I am so sorry. I knew you were anxious, so I strolled up this way to waylay you with the good news."

"How good of you! And you have been sitting up with him?"

"Yes; Lortzing and I have been taking the off nights in turn, and when we are both on at the theater, old Diehl, his dresser, comes round. You know the old fellow is perfectly devoted to Dahlmann; he would sit up every night, if he was allowed."

"They have not had a hospital nurse, then?"

"No; he hates strange women about him, and of course the poor little wife can't do night and day both. She is not at all well herself; got something the matter with her back, I believe; and she is not much of a nurse at the best of times. When he is better she sits beside him with a novel and forgets his medicine, and when he is worse she drops the novel and weeps over him. She had a cousin there helping for a time, but Ehren couldn't bear the sight of her, so she kept to the kitchen department, and compounded wonderful gruels and possets."

While he talked Clare had sat up and gradually composed herself. "I don't know what you must think of me, behaving so strangely," she said, as she put away her handkerchief and pushed up her disordered curls under her veil.

He laid his warm, kind hand over hers for a moment. "Think?" he said; "why, I think that Miss Arrow-smith has a deal more tender-heartedness than some of her critics at the theater give her credit for. If I had indeed brought you bad news, I should have thought it far more strange if you could have heard it unmoved."

His taking everything for granted so comfortably relieved her. "I can't begin to thank you," she said, looking up at him with eyes still swimming.

"I shall see him again in the course of the day," pursued Armbrecht; "would you like me to give him any message from you."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she began, then caught herself up. "I mean, will you tell him that I am exceedingly glad to hear that he is better, and so will my mother be. I hope he will soon be quite restored."

"Ah!" said Armbrecht to himself, "so they have quarreled. Poor girl! no wonder she felt upset. I used to think the feeling was all on his side; but I am not so sure."

She began to put her glove on again; she felt she ought not to detain her companion longer; eleven o'clock was drawing near, but there was one thing more she wanted to know. She looked down at the buttons at her wrist, with which she was fumbling. "Was he off his head at all?" she asked at last.

"Never by day; he used to ramble a bit at night sometimes; but, you know," he added, guessing her thought, "it is a fond superstition to imagine that people in fevers make interesting revelations about themselves; they never do, except in novels. They are seldom even coherent. Sometimes I could gather that he fancied himself among the mountains, trying to climb some impossible peak; but at the worst, when he had blisters on, his favorite fancy was that he was on a gridiron, and the

cooks would not do the other side. Whether he thought himself a chop or St. Lawrence I can't say."

And Clare, relieved of a haunting fear, yet felt an unreasonable pang that her name should have been blotted out, even from his fever dreams.

"And now," said Armbrecht, "I must hurry; and if you will take my advice, you will let me find your maid, and tell her to say that you have a bad headache,—which, I can see, is true enough,—and you go home and lie down. You really are not fit for the practice this morning, thanks to my having given you such a fright."

Clare was usually little prone to let herself be dictated to, but she was meek to-day, and thankfully did as he bade her.

A week or two later Dr. Zornlinn was sitting beside the armchair to which Dahlmann had been promoted, regarding him silently in a curious, observant way he had. He took off his spectacles, polished them carefully, and replaced them, and continued his scrutiny much as if his patient were some small object under the microscope. Ehrenfried had grown nervous since his illness; he flushed uneasily, and said with an irritated laugh: "Well, what is it, doctor? If you think I am going to slip through your fingers after all your trouble, don't scruple to mention it. I have no objection, I am sure."

"No objection! What do you mean?" cried the doctor angrily.

"Well, I have no business to say that, I suppose, and I am grateful for the skill which has pulled me through; but,—oh, my God! I'm such a coward I dare hardly ask you,—can you pull my voice through as well?"

"Tut, tut!" said the doctor; "if you expect to sing after a month in bed with blisters on your side, and when you can only just walk across the room, you are a greater

fool than I took you for. You must have a rest, of course; go abroad, or try a sea voyage."

"That is all very fine, Herr Doctor, but, like most of my craft, I have been like the grasshopper in the fable. We never expect the rainy day to come so soon, you know. The truth is, I can't afford to play about. I must get to work again as soon as you can patch me up decently. Ah!" as a card was brought in, "here is the Herr Intendant. Come to tell me that if a man will not work neither shall he eat, I suppose. Show the Herr Graf in, Lina."

"Well, Dahlmann, I am glad to see you up, and getting on, I hope," said Von Wenzel, who was looking more sleek and well-looking than ever, as he deposited his rotund person beside the invalid. "We have missed you at the theater, I need not tell you. You know, of course, that we have been obliged to engage Kritzler's friend Hänfling, *pro tem*. Just to keep your place warm for you, so to say."

"You are very good, sir. I am afraid I have inconvenienced you, and it is difficult to say when I shall be able to come back. You must ask the Herr Doctor about that."

"You may ask me in a few weeks' time," put in the doctor. "I don't pretend to be an oracle."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I did rather want to get some notion of probabilities. Hänfling is fidgeting to know how long we want to keep him. He is fairly well liked in front, but between ourselves he and Miss Arrow-smith don't pull well together."

Dahlmann flushed and paled. He felt yet totally unequal to discussing and deciding on plans, but that name reminded him that the effort must be made. His illness had been a breathing time, and it seemed almost too soon to come out of its shelter; but if he meant to

leave Blankenstadt, here was his chance, hemmed round with difficulties though it might be. It would not be fair to the management to let them miss his substitute.

"I have been considering, Herr Graf," he said, leaning forward, with his long gaunt hands gripping the arms of his chair. "I have been considering whether it would not be fairer, since I doubt very much being able to resume work this summer, to set aside my contract by consent, or rather to transfer it to Hänfling."

The Intendant looked at the doctor, and the doctor shook his head and frowned at him. He hitched his chair a little nearer to Dahlmann's, and laid his hand on his. "Isn't this quixotic?" he said, "and morbid and unnecessary besides? As Zornlinn says, you can't expect to sing yet, and we don't expect it of you. Of course you must have a rest. Now, I am going to put it to you from what ought to be your own point of view if you were seeing straight. Say you give up here, making over all your advantages to your rival, and you take an idle summer if you can afford it. Very good. But the chances are you won't begin again quite at your full strength. Granted you have a reputation to go upon, still, having left here from a breakdown of health will tell against you in seeking another engagement, and you will not meet with the indulgence you would in this place, where your illness and its cause are known and have created interest. Do you see?"

"I see, and it is all most true, and yet there are reasons—— I think I had better go. Perhaps a warmer climate——"

"Climate! Nonsense, with all the summer before you! Now, this is my proposal: we will keep on Hänfling for six months, and you shall extend your sick leave to three, drawing your salary, of course, and you can go away. Then, when you first come back, you may sing in turn with

him, or if your strength should still be unequal to long parts, you must take minor ones for a time. Now, what do you say?"

"That you are too generous, Herr Intendant. Still I think I had better give up."

"You hold your tongue," said the doctor, leaning forward and placing his fingers on Dahlmann's wrist. "You are not in a state to decide about business, and you will certainly make a fool of yourself. We will leave my patient quiet, if you please, Herr Intendant. By and by, if he has two grains of sense, he will accept your proposal, but for the present he is to think of nothing."

"What do you say, Herr Doctor; will he recover his voice?" asked the Intendant when they were outside together.

"I trust so; it is too early yet to say definitely. I gather it is the only thing he has to depend on, and he has been worrying about it to an extent which keeps him back. If he is fool enough to decline your proposal, I don't see what he is to do. I can't understand myself why he did not catch at it."

"Nor I, unless there is some jealousy of Hänfling at work. You have no conception of the cranks of these singers."

XXXI.

Up in the Lindenthal life moved slowly. People counted their time by hay and harvest, by the blossoming of the apple trees and the gathering in of the fruit. Snow followed cider-making, and shut the valley in like a cloister till the sun loosed the fetters and the icebound streams wept themselves free, and flowering time came round once more.

"How many times have the lilacs bloomed since Ehren went away?" Reichardt was asking himself as he brushed past the heavy purple spikes that leaned over the gate of the parsonage garden, and some subtle association brought the old friend to his mind. Lilac and syringa. How heavy the air had been with perfume that May evening so long ago, when they had sat together in the little square arbor, and discussed whether the one should go and the other be left! His mind had been full of his friend these many days. Letters had become few and far between, but Dahlmann was a public character now, and the papers had duly informed the valley of his serious illness. It was many a long year since the recluse had traversed the brief twenty miles to the town, and ventured himself in the hum and bustle of the streets grown strange to him. But the thought of Ehrenfried's danger drew him like a magnet, and when the accounts were at the worst he put himself on board the steamer one day, and, bravely making his way through the jostling crowds, like an unaccustomed swimmer through the breakers, knocked at his friend's door, to be told that "Herr Dahlmann was very sorry, he was too ill to see anyone;

and Frau Dahlmann was resting after a very bad night." It never struck him that the sick man had not been told; hurt and dejected he turned away and went home again.

It was always so; it was natural; those who went out into the world forgot the lonely ones who were left at home.

He was on his way down to the church; he would turn in at the boat-builder's and learn if any news had been received lately; the papers had ceased to issue bulletins for more than a week past, which, as far as it went, was good. As he passed between the great stacks of logs which hemmed in the approach, he paused a moment and looked round to see if there was anyone about to save him going up to the house and paying a formal call on its mistress. The yard was very quiet; it seemed a slack time. From the far side of a great bulging, tarry hull, set up on stays, came a sound of rhythmic tapping, but near at hand there was nobody but one small child at play by himself,—busily at work, rather,—selecting from the heaps of litter and sawdust such small chunks of wood as took his fancy, and carrying them out like a squirrel to his nest, evidently intent on building a house of his own.

Anton watched him a while, amused at his solitary absorption, and marveling at a child's power of acting without an audience; but presently the boy grew conscious that he was no longer alone; he dropped the corner of his pinafore, letting some of his treasures roll out unheeded, and gazed at the intruder. Something in those large, wide-open, light-blue eyes struck Reichardt; they were so like—and Georg Dahlmann had no children. Could it be Ehren's boy? He stepped promptly over the low fence, calling out, "Little man, come here and tell me what is your name."

This was too much for the equanimity of five years old,

It was bad enough to find the strange eyes of a grown-up person staring into the delightful realms of make-believe, but when it came to the owner of the eyes invading one's playhouse bodily,—an alarming being in a long black coat, quite unlike uncle or any of the workmen,—it was time to seek protection. The blue pinafore and the sturdy legs scuttled away round the prow of the vessel, and Anton, following, came to a sudden halt, for on a log on the lee-side he saw a tall man sitting, with a pipe in his mouth, reading a newspaper.

Surely it was—yet it could not be—so aged, so worn, with such a languid stoop in the stalwart shoulders. Then, roused by the beating of little hands on his knee, the reader looked up, threw down the paper, and sprang to his feet; and the clasp of his arms dispelled every doubt.

“My dear Ehren! They never told me you were coming. For a moment I could not believe my eyes.”

“I only arrived last evening. I was coming up presently to surprise you. I ought to have written, but, you know, I have been ill.”

“Ill! I should think so. What have you been doing to yourself?”

“Why, I was fool enough to tumble into the ice in the winter; and then, as it was a first experiment in illness, I did it pretty thoroughly while I was about it. But now come and sit down and tell me about yourself.”

“Oh! of me there is nothing to tell. How should there be? My days go on, one like another. My sole event in these seven years was my pilgrimage to see you three weeks ago.”

“To see me? When? What do you mean?”

“Ah, I see! They did not tell you. Well, it doesn't signify now.”

“No, that they didn't. Do you suppose I should have let you go again if once I had got hold of you? So you

actually ventured yourself into the vortex of Blankenstadt for my sake, dear old fellow." Dahlmann laughed, but there was a moved look in his eyes.

"And now you must come and stop at the parsonage," pursued Reichardt.

"Not just yet, I think, thanks. My brother and his wife are very good, and they would be hurt. Besides, there is the child. His aunt is delighted with him, but she isn't used to such little folks, and I should not like to leave him."

"His mother is not with you, then?"

"No: she was rather used up after my illness, and a friend of hers was bent on taking her to Bittstein to try the waters. She wanted me to go there too, but I had got homesick, and longed to get out of the crowd and not be stared at, and I insisted on bringing the boy with me. I don't like hotel life for babies, and my people wanted to see him."

There was a shadow on his face as he spoke, and it was easy to guess there had been strife on the subject. The latest manifestation of Hedwig's jealous temper had been a resentment at the affection growing up between father and child. Her thwarted love poured itself out upon the little one, and when the boy, as children will, trampled upon her facile indulgence and adored the father whose sternness sometimes awed him, she felt defrauded of her right. While they were in the cradle Ehrenfried had regarded his babies with a somewhat distant and puzzled interest, but now that his little son began to develop a mind and will of his own, his fatherly instincts were drawn out. If she had known it, it was the strongest weapon for the defense of her own rights that she was bent on blunting.

"I wanted to show you my son, too. Come here, Toni, and kiss your godfather."

The child sidled up, still carefully holding up the lap of his pinafore, which was loaded with chips and other treasures, and stood leaning against his father's knee, regarding the stranger with large, inquiring eyes. Anton held out his hand, but did not hurry him, and after a minute his little mind was made up; he held up a round, red mouth, and still further sealed this offer of friendship by selecting from the depths of his store a particularly long and curly shaving and a three-cornered chunk of wood, which he laid on the knee of his new acquaintance with an angelic smile.

"He is rather a nice little chap, isn't he?" said his father, as the little one trotted off to his house-building.

"Nice? He is a splendid fellow!" The eyes of the childless man followed the boy wistfully. "You are a happy man, Ehren."

Yet as they talked he began to doubt the truth of that assertion, though his friend let it pass without question. It is not in success, however brilliant, to satisfy the heart of man, and it seemed to Anton that the young school-master, with his narrow outward life and wide grasp of possibilities, had been the happier. Gone were the easily satisfied desires, the tranquil self-confidence that had characterized his youth; even his look was changed. The wide-open gaze which Reichardt saw reflected in the child had given place to a droop of the heavy eyelids with their thick blond fringes, and the stern set lines about the mouth were deeper than should have been written by seven years of hard work or strenuous rivalry. It was not merely the natural sobriety of maturer years: his fresh youthfulness had consisted with a sober gravity always; but he looked older than he had any right to look, though the promise of growing stout with advancing years had not been fulfilled. Wasted by illness, he was thin to gauntness.

He himself was under the impression that he was talking cheerfully. He did not touch on the apprehension about his voice, which made a shadowy background to his thoughts, but spoke of his summer at Bayreuth and of various matters he thought would interest his music-loving friend, and asked about the school, and inquired of the well-doing of some of his old pupils, nor knew that his face was being read.

Knitting severed friendships up is never easy work when the chasm has been unbridged by letters, and when the two parted to go their several ways they felt perhaps farther from each other than they had done any time since they last clasped hands upon the jetty.

XXXII.

THE pastor was walking slowly up the Lindengrund beside the little brown bubbling stream, with his head bent and his hands loosely clasped behind him. The day was hot, but here in the narrow chasm between the cliffs a cool dimness reigned, though overhead, above the black fringes of the pines, ran a strip of vivid sapphire blue. Somewhere up there, out of sight, a thrush was pouring out his heart in a torrent of passionate joy.

But the joy of summer just now was looking like sorrow to Anton. He was disappointed in the return of his friend. His own maimed and narrowed existence had refreshed itself with the tranquil, healthy youth of the other, and in losing him, though he missed for long the daily comradeship, he had never lost the remembrance of his wholesome, sunshiny nature. He had pleased his fancy with picturing him crowned with success, living a full life of devotion to the art they both loved, and going on from triumph to triumph with swift-growing fame, as he traced his course in the public prints. And now he was here, and seemed farther off than when Blankenstadt held him. It was not that he was cold or forgetful of old ties; he was affectionate, yet seemed to stand apart in a shadow which his old friend could not penetrate.

It was a grief to the solitary man who loved so few. He had learned to do without his friend; but to have him again in the body and not in the spirit was a much greater trial. He loved Dahlmann as few men love, with a passionate intensity "passing the love of women," and

to his reserved but emotional temperament, naturally vehement in its loves and its hates, but pent into a narrow channel, it was intense pain to feel himself held at arm's length. He was on his way to the high bare hill crest which had been such a favorite resort of his and Ehren's in old days, with the perverse womanish instinct to sharpen pain by quickening memory, and every step of the way was set with reminders.

The path led past the platform where the water-mill stood niched in its eyrie, and as he neared the walnut tree that overhung the gate which divided the garden from the public pathway, he heard a discordant sound rising above the loud rush of the water and the undertone of the slowly turning wheel—the sound of a woman's voice, high pitched and dissonant.

"No, you shall not cross my threshold. I wonder you are not ashamed to show yourself here after neglecting my Hedwig and breaking her heart! But, I'd have you to know, she has them that will take her part and see her righted. I'll not stand by and see a play-actress put in her place."

Dahlmann was standing with his hand upon the gate, white as a sheet, and looking perfectly stunned by the onslaught. The child meanwhile had slipped just inside the garden, attracted by the crimson blossoms of some hen-and-chicken daisies that grew close to the pathway, and was filling his little hands with them; but when the angry voice ceased he suddenly looked up, and, catching sight of the red and wrathful countenance, fled to his father, clinging round his legs with a little whimper of affright. His small conscience took to itself the angry looks, and accused him of a shocking iniquity.

"Didn't mean to steal the lady's flowers," he sobbed; "didn't know they were hers. Toni thought the daisies were everybody's."

Dahlmann stooped and picked him up, and strode off uphill without a word of reply, while the red daisies fell scattered on the path as Toni's fists unclosed to grasp his father's coat collar. Reichardt stepped back, unseen or unheeded, and the Frau Mühlerin, with a startled, half-ashamed glance at him, disappeared into her own premises. He stood doubtful a moment, then followed his friend. He was pretty sure he would not be able to keep up for long the pace at which he was breasting the hill, for it grew steeper and steeper, and in a very few minutes he came upon him, leaning his back against a tree, panting and distressed, while the child, unconscious of anything amiss, rambled along the bank, consoling himself with the daisies which were "everybody's."

"Ehren, you are ill!" Anton exclaimed as he reached him. "What can I do for you? Shall I fetch you some water?"

Dahlmann shook his head. "It is nothing," he said when he could speak; "only I must rest a minute. I was a fool," he went on after an interval of labored breathing, "to go racing uphill, carrying that heavy boy too, but I didn't quite realize what I was about. I can't take those liberties yet; only one forgets. I am not used to taking care of myself."

"You had no business to come so far; you are not strong enough yet for that steep walk."

"I suppose not; but I promised Hedwig to take the boy up to see her aunt as soon as I was able. Well, we won't speak of that. Come, my little son, if you have got daisies enough we must trot home to tea and Tante Anna. No, father can't act packhorse any longer. You are not tired?"

But the little fellow had already walked farther than he was used to, and was fretful till his godfather took him on his back and cantered down the hill with him. It

was a relief to Anton to occupy himself with the boy; without him the walk would have been painfully silent. He had been too much disturbed by what he had heard to be able to talk readily of other things, and Ehrenfried had either no breath or no mind for conversation. At the parsonage gate he held out his arms for his boy, but Anton would not hear of letting them go farther.

"My dear boy, do you suppose I am going to let you tramp another mile when you are hardly fit to stand? Come in and rest, like a sensible fellow."

"Not to-night, thanks. I'll come up and see you another day, but it is late already to keep the little chap out. And, besides—well, I am rather done up and want to be quiet."

"Quiet! Don't you think you can be as quiet with me as at the wharf? Since when have we grown to be strangers, that you need company manners in my house? You and the boy must sleep here to-night, and I will send down word to your brother. Old Betti will fall in love with my godson."

He resisted no longer, and Anton left him alone in the familiar study, where the very books upon the shelves kept their unaltered places, so that even in the gathering dusk he fancied he could read the well-remembered titles. The ivory keys of the chamber organ gleamed out of the dim shadowy corner like the smile of an old friend's face. He lay down upon the broad chintz-covered sofa, and tried to quiet himself physically and mentally. He was a man who rarely gave expression to anger, but in spite of the disdainful silence with which he had received the attack made against him, his soul was seething with indignation. He had been more deeply angered against his wife than ever before, and a thought was rising in his mind which, through the mists of passion, looked like a right thing and a just.

His host left him for a long time alone. He was busying himself with his smaller guest, carrying him into the kitchen and amusing him there with the cat, while his housekeeper made the guest's room ready, and even after her return staying to play with him till old Betti should no longer seem a stranger. It was nearly dark when he re-entered the study.

"The boy is very happy," he said. "He and Betti have made great friends; she is giving him his supper."

"Thanks. I hope he won't be a nuisance."

"How are you now?"

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks; it was only the hill."

"Shall we have the lamp in?"

"Not unless you want it; this is pleasanter."

Anton went to the open lattice and leaned out. The sky was full of light yet, and would be nearly all night, and the stars were but faint pin-pricks in the blue. It was so still that a blossom falling from the syringa against the window made a distinct rustle. A sense came to him that here with his friend close beside him he was lonelier than he had been without him these seven years. He had promised himself to be silent, but the craving friendship demanded speech. He turned suddenly from the window.

"Ehren, I don't know whether you knew that I was a witness of that extraordinary scene this afternoon? Frau Tucher seemed to be shutting her doors against you. What does it mean?"

Dahlmann sat up slowly, erect, with a hand clenched on each knee, but for a minute he did not speak, and the other broke out again in an agitated voice:

"You don't answer me. You think it an impertinence that I should put such a question. Well, so be it! But can I remain outside, uninterested, as if your concerns were nothing to me, remembering as I do the days when

our lives touched at every point? Is our old friendship dead? Can I be as a stranger to you?"

Ehrenfried stretched out his hand and clasped the thin nervous fingers that were restlessly moving among the papers on the table. "Not so. I only did not speak directly because I was trying to choose the words in which I might answer truly, and it is difficult. You want to know whether Frau Tucher's accusations were true?"

"No, no! I know you too well for that."

"It is not true," he went on, "that I have been unfaithful to my wife, or have ever, until this day, contemplated putting another in her place. If I am thinking of it now, it is because she has shown me how vain my struggle has been. She, it seems, already regards me as guilty, and has so little respect for the relation between us that she confides her suspicions of me to her family. Worse than all, she has besmirched the fair name of the purest and best of women. I have been considering whether, after all, it were not better to give up an untenable position."

Reichardt stood and looked at him. "Is this the man," he said, "who, here in this very room, was willing to put his own happiness in pawn sooner than fail to fulfill his obligations? And now that not only word and vow are at stake, but the pledge of a life lived together, would break faith?"

"Is it breaking faith if Hedwig were willing? If she thinks she has this against me, she may wish to rid herself of me, and if so, with such marriage laws as ours, it would not be difficult." He got up and began to pace restlessly about the room. "Do you suppose," he broke out presently, "that there have not been a hundred devils at my ear these many months past, whispering how easy it would be to break my fetters and be free to offer a legally unassailable position to the woman I love?"

"Devils? Aye!"

"And I would not listen. I said to myself I might suffer, but Clare's reputation should be safe. But the harm is done."

"It is not done so long as you have not sinned."

"Unless to be tempted is to sin, I have not sinned."

"Then slander must die, unless you give it life."

"I have told myself that, but what happened to-day has shaken my resolve. When I recall the struggles of the last year: how guarded I have been; how for months I have denied myself speech with her except in public—and now to find that it has been all in vain! I might as well have given rein to every desire."

"Not so. It is what is, not what is said, that matters. Will it right you to justify your accusers by doing wrong?"

"Wrong? Aye, there it is. Some would say it would not be wrong since it can be legalized; but I cannot persuade myself of it. There is a sacredness in marriage beyond what law can bind or loose. I took Hedwig's life in my hand with a solemn vow to be true to her, and on the faith of it she has given me her youth, her freshness, her beauty. If I cast her off, her life would be broken."

He went on with his restless tramp up and down, and his friend said: "I knew this would be your real purpose. You spoke just now out of the bitterness of the moment. I so well remember once, years ago, you and I were discussing the anomalous state of the marriage law in different parts of Germany, and you spoke out in no doubtful tone of the deplorable laxity there."

"I remember. I think the same still. And shall I be false to my convictions because the case is my own? It is impossible! Even if Hedwig, in a fit of jealous resentment, wished for a separation, I should be a mean hound if I took advantage of it. If I give her back her freedom, what is left for her? The position of a dis-

carded wife, which she has done nothing to deserve. I should only outrage my own conscience and Clare's. In her sight such a union would be no true marriage, I know full well, even if she would ever consent to it."

"Does she return your feeling?"

Ehrenfried stood a moment by the window and looked out. "She would die rather than confess it if she does. I spoke just now of being tempted; but the word was misleading. The temptation came from within, not from her; never from her. When I was mad enough to betray what I felt, she forbade me her presence; she begged me, if possible, to leave the place."

"To love a woman like that," said Reichardt slowly, "ought to be a source of purity and strength, not of weakness."

Dahlmann came back and sat down again beside him. "It shall be!" he said.

They sat in silence for a little while, then Ehrenfried spoke with a return of his own calm manner:

"Anton, I should like to tell you, if I could, how all this has come about. I don't want to say anything unkind of Hedwig; but to you I may speak openly. I was mistaken in her, as you warned me. I thought her gentle and affectionate; I found her selfish and fretful, suspicious of me, and never content with anything I could do for her. I know now that she never really touched or stirred any deep feeling in me; but I was fond of her, and I tried to be as good to her as I knew how. When the pretty, soft ways that used to attract me changed to hardness and sharpness, I grew cold; but I always respected her claims. I was disappointed, but I was fool enough to fancy that I could supplement the shortcomings of my marriage by intellectual comradeship,—there is a strain of coldness, an absence of little feminine allurements in Clare, that make the idea less

preposterous than it sounds,—but life will not be divided into separate compartments; a man is one and indivisible—body, soul, and spirit. Well, the experiment was foredoomed to failure.”

“Have you loved her long?”

“I don’t know. Yes, from the very first, I think, only I would not admit it. I was already betrothed when we first met, and in my vanity I believed that Hedwig loved me and I should sacrifice her happiness if I broke with her. I have sacrificed it far more surely as it is. But I kept myself in the dark a long time. It is only in the last year that I have realized that the friendship which had been an inspiration in my work and my best happiness, which had filled and comforted all the waste places of my life, must be given up because it had come to claim all—that, in short, I dared not call it friendship any longer.”

“You have never told me who it is that has this influence over you, but I suppose I can guess. You once spoke of her to me, did you not, in the very beginning of your Blankenstadt life?”

“Yes. There has never been but the one woman for me.”

“And now what will you do?”

“Do?”

“You will leave Blankenstadt? You cannot be meeting her constantly.”

“My dear Anton, I must; there is no help for it. I did intend to try if it could not be arranged for me to get my contract canceled, since she wished it; but my illness has complicated the whole matter. Besides the contract there are ties of obligation and gratitude that I cannot set aside. If my voice comes back—and it is coming—I am bound to return.”

“Is it wise?”

"I don't know whether it is wise. I know I am thankful for the necessity. To think of seeing her again, even afar off, is like the vision of water in the desert. I have not seen her for more than six weeks. Once while I was ill I heard the sound of her voice, the rustle of her dress, outside my door." He broke off, and leaned his forehead on the top of the sofa.

Anton laid a tender hand on his shoulder. "I feel for you more than I can tell," he said; "but don't think me cruel if I say—ought you to risk it?"

"I think so. If there is a right way, it must be possible to follow it."

After a few minutes' quiet musing he spoke again: "Do you know, I think I was a fool not to demand Frau Tucher's authority for speaking to me as she did? At the moment it seemed it would humiliate me too much to make any answer to such an attack. Possibly some exaggerated Blankenstadt gossip has found its way round. I can hardly believe that my wife can have accused me to her while I was ill. Why, she herself asked me to take the child there."

"Will you let me go to the mill for you, and find out what Frau Tucher thinks she knows, and from whom she learned it? It will be better than your entering on the subject with your wife, or going home with the suspicion in your mind."

"Will you really? It is too good of you, for I believe you hate encounters with the Frau Mühlerinn even more than I do."

"I would do more than that for your sake, old friend. Another thing I want to say. If you should ever feel it wise to leave Blankenstadt, however suddenly, or if your health should need a longer rest, you must come to me. You and yours can always count on a home under my roof."

Before Ehrenfried could express the gratitude that lay too deep for utterance, there came a sharp rap at the door, and Betti stood indignant on the threshold. "Sir," she said reprovingly to her master, "you told me I was not to come till you rang, and there has your supper been ready and waiting this hour past. The poor dear little young gentleman would not let me put him to bed without his dad-da, so he dropped asleep in my lap, tired out. I have just laid him down on the settle, and there he lies like a cherub with his thumb in his mouth."

"Oh, poor child!" cried his father; "I quite forgot him. He ought to have been in his bed hours ago. His mother may well say I am not fit to be trusted with him. If you will just undress him and slip him into bed, Betti, I'll be bound he won't wake, and I will come up to him soon."

But Master Anton the younger was not to be disposed of so easily. Ere the two men had finished their supper a loud bellowing made itself heard, followed by the abrupt entry of Betti, bearing in her arms the cherub of an hour ago, transformed into a little demon, kicking and struggling lustily, and clad in a very brief and insufficient garment. Dahlmann hastened to the rescue.

"Why, Betti, I am afraid my son has been disgracing himself, when you had been so kind to him, too. I am so sorry. What is it, my little one? There, there, it is all right; father has got you."

"Well, I do declare," said the good woman, smoothing down her apron, "anybody might have thought I was killing him. I had all but got him undressed, and I was wondering whatever to put on him for a night-gown, for his little day shirt don't hardly reach to his knees, when he woke up and wanted his mamma, and when he found himself in a strange room he set up roar-

ing till there was nothing for it but to bring him down just as he was. A body couldn't hear themselves speak. I am used to children, too," she added, bridleing a little at the notion that she could not manage him.

"We are very penitent, Betti," said his father. "He does get these waking panics sometimes; I used to myself, I believe, when I was his age. He has been so good lately I thought he had outgrown them. It was my fault. No doubt he fancied I had forsaken him."

The storm was lulled as quickly as it had arisen. The child lay back against his father's breast in perfect content, with the tears hanging upon his eyelashes and an occasional subsiding gasp; but he shrank and gripped hold of Ehrenfried's collar when Betti held out her arms.

"He is quite good now, sir; shall I take him?"

"I'll keep him, thanks. You won't mind, Anton? He'll be very quiet as long as he feels me holding him. You see now what an invasion of your bachelor establishment would entail," he added with a smile.

While Betti was gone to fetch a shawl to wrap up the little rebel, Anton regarded the two thoughtfully. The round dimpled hand lay on the broad muscular one, and the soft small fingers held on to the long ones. A perception came to him of the strength that might lie in the little hand. If Ehrenfried had to walk on the edge of a precipice, there was a force that might keep him firm.

"God has given you a strong helper there, Ehren," he said.

Ehrenfried looked up over the boy's head. "Yes, that is true. It is not as if it were one's own life alone that is concerned. If there were nothing else, he would hold me and his mother together. I could never be so wickedly cruel as to rob her of him; but he is my son; I am answerable for the way he is brought up. I would cut off my right hand sooner than give him up."

XXXIII.

IN spite of his valiant desire to do battle on behalf of his friend, Reichardt was conscious of a sensation uncomfortably like cowardice as he sat waiting in the Frau Mühlerin's best parlor, impatiently tapping the hard, glazed tablecover, and disturbing the symmetry of the wax flowers and albums wherewith it was adorned. If he had but known it, his antagonist felt hardly more courageous, as she hastily donned her black lace cap in the bedroom above, and would thankfully have said "Not at home," but such fictions did not pass current in the valley.

Despite his gentleness, the Herr Pfarrer was an object of more awe than affection to his flock. The tragedy that enveloped him, the solitary life he led, kept him apart from the little busy interests of village life, and, kindly as he was, his people feared him as children fear the dark. Living so long among them, he was yet unknown, unknowable. Frau Tucher was fond of arrogating to herself a little cheap superiority among her neighbors by asserting that she would not mind telling the Herr Pfarrer this or that to his face, but when confronted with him she quailed.

Both combatants, however, showed a bold front; the pastor looked stern, the milleress aggressive, though she made a courtesy in the doorway to which he responded with an unsmiling bow. He offered no hand in greeting, and she saw he did not come on a peaceful errand. He cleared his throat:

"I come on behalf of my friend Dahlmann," he began.

"You made certain accusations against him yesterday in my presence; he wishes to know on whose authority."

Frau Tucher had grasped the principle that when you are in the wrong the safest plan is to answer no direct questions, so to this she replied, "You could see for yourself, sir, he was unable to answer me a word."

"Answer!" cried Anton with heat. "Do you suppose a man's dignity and self-respect would suffer him to take any notice of such an insolent attack, made upon him in the hearing of passers-by and before his child?"

War being thus carried into the enemy's country, she found herself put upon the defensive. "Insolent, indeed! I should like to know what you mean by that, sir. And as to my speaking at the gate, I was not going to ask him into my house, that I was determined."

"Since he went to your house at the request of your niece, I think he has a right to demand why he should be turned from your door."

"Why! And didn't I tell him why? and he did not like to hear it."

"The point is this," urged Reichardt steadily; "on what grounds do you accuse him of conduct disgraceful to himself and injurious to your niece?"

"Ah, I have no doubt to you he would make his own story good."

"There is no story at all, so far as I am aware; if there is, I wish to know your authority for it."

"Ah, poor dear!" said Frau Tucher, shifting her ground, "I always knew he would make her miserable, when he gave up his good prospects here and took up with a godless life at the theater."

The slipperiness of the woman almost daunted Anton; it seemed impossible to keep her to the point. "If anyone is responsible for the marriage it is yourself," he said. "When Dahlmann came back the first time, and, in

view of your disapproval and Hedwig's discontent, was willing to release her, you hurried it on. If you bring about a breach now, you will incur a still graver responsibility."

"I bring about a breach? I intend to make Hedwig stand up for her rights."

"Her rights are not threatened. If they should be in the future, it will be because you have caused a quarrel between them. Once more I demand of you: did Hedwig say her husband had forsaken her?"

"She, poor lamb? No, that she didn't, but bears it all like an angel. Haven't I seen with my own eyes how he treated her when her baby was lying in its little coffin? But we have heard all about it all the same; she has friends in Blankenstadt who take her part. When my Löttchen stayed there she heard all about his goings-on, while the poor dear was wearing herself out nursing him; and, if I wanted proof of it, he comes away and leaves her alone."

Reichardt rose. "Then I have ascertained the main point: that Hedwig did not make these accusations behind her husband's back while he lay ill. I could hardly believe she had done so. If you wish to avert an irreparable quarrel between them that might end in a separation, you will write to him and state distinctly that in what you said you spoke from hearsay and without authority. I will wait while you write."

The Frau Mühlerinn looked at him a moment doubtfully as if she meditated refusing; then went to the bureau, and in her round, businesslike hand indited the letter he required.

The honors of victory were certainly the pastor's. When he had gone Frau Tucher fanned herself violently with her pocket handkerchief.

"I never was so browbeaten in my life," she said.

"Next Sunday I shall go to the open-air preaching on the Tannenberg."

"Well, I have done your errand," said Reichardt, finding his friend on his favorite log in the boat-building yard. "I have extracted this precious document, such as it is."

Dahlmann ran his eye over it. "Have you read it? It is not gracious; she withdraws nothing; but she admits Hedwig was not responsible, and I am thankful for that. I see whose hand has been at work. Well, I suppose one can only live it down. A thousand thanks. You saved my writing off in hasty anger."

Reichardt promised himself a peaceful month of his friend's company. Voice and strength came back but slowly, and Dahlmann had gladly consented to spend a few weeks at the parsonage when his visit to the wharf should be over. He felt as though he were in harbor to refit, and was not sorry to extend the time a little and gain more strength of mind as well as of body before meeting the storms again; but it was not to be.

One morning the pastor went down early in hope of fixing the day for his visitors to come to him. Ehrenfried was not in the boat-yard, where he was usually to be found enjoying the fresh breezes from the river. Toni was playing about by himself, and babbled something incoherent about seeing mother, and he went up to the house. The hall door stood open, as it generally did. No one in the parlor; only a sound of voices and movements in the back premises where Frau Dahlmann was overlooking her maids. Anton would not intrude upon her, but mounted the stairs to Ehrenfried's room, and there found him, kneeling in front of a portmanteau, the floor strewn with things—Toni's little socks and shirts looking comically small among the larger garments.

"You are packing up to come to me? That is right."

"No. I am sorry; it is very disappointing. I am going home; at least, I am going first to Bittstein to fetch my wife."

"Is anything the matter?"

He rose and held out a letter. "Here, you may read it. I don't think it is anything serious; still, she is frightened and unhappy, and wants me. Of course I must go."

Hedwig wrote piteously. Bittstein had not done her the good she expected; she had felt more ill, and had consulted a doctor there, who detected mischief he thought might need a slight operation. Always nervous about her own health, she was terrified. "I am so frightened; I wish you would come to me!" was the burden of her letter. "Minna wants me to rouse myself and go about, and I feel so miserable. I wish I was at home." It was not in Ehrenfried's nature to be deaf to her appeal.

Anton went with him to the jetty, and saw him go in heavier sadness than he had felt when they parted six years ago. "Ah, well!" he said to himself as he watched the lessening trail of smoke behind the steamer, "perhaps it is for the best. An appeal to his compassion and generosity will hold him as nothing else would. After all, it is character and not happiness that really matters, and in this stress he is being shaped to nobler ends than an easy, contented life could have wrought."

XXXIV.

CLARE ARROWSMITH had just got back from the opera and was standing in her own room, still in the straight white gown in which she had been playing Elsa of Brabant, while her mother, looking shrunken and frail in her loose dressing gown, and with her becoming puffs of silver hair hidden under a large cap, was hovering about her, trying with trembling fingers to unfasten the clasp of the jeweled girdle.

"You must let me help you to-night, dearest," she was saying. "I dawdled on purpose that I might be awake to hear how it went off."

Latterly, Madame Malaxa had almost given up going to the theater with her daughter in the evening; she was beginning to find that she was no longer so young as she had been.

"There is nothing to hear; what should there be?" said Clare impatiently, as she undid the clasp herself with a quick movement and turned to lay the belt in its case. She had sent away her maid, and would fain have sent away her mother too, for she longed to be alone. The anxious solicitude Madame Malaxa had showed lately worried her unbearably. They used to be the closest of friends, this mother and daughter, but for a year or more they had been growing apart, for the daughter had been entering into regions of suffering where sympathy could not follow her, and the mother often felt lonely and rebuffed. Clara reproached herself not seldom, but she had to tread her thorny path alone. Her dark eyebrows were drawn together with a distressed expression as she

looked round from the dressing table. "What do you want to know? Isn't 'Lohengrin' an old story?"

"You had Herr Hänfling, then?"

"We had."

"I thought to the last perhaps Ehrenfried would take it, after all. I hear his wife is almost well again. I suppose he isn't strong enough."

"He says he isn't. Graf von Wenzel wanted him to try, but he declined. He just put in an appearance as Gottfried."

"It was just like that tiresome little woman to fall ill and bring him back before he was fit for it. I inquired at the door to-day, and heard she was on the sofa and the nurse had just left, so I suppose there is no longer any cause for anxiety, but I must say I thought him looking very worn and worried when I met him the other day."

It was unlike Madame Malaxa's wonted tact to keep harping on the subject of their old friend, since during his illness, if not before, she had had grave doubts as to the way her daughter regarded him. Possibly she wanted to attain some certainty in her own mind; possibly Clare's stoical calm had lulled her misgivings. She was growing old too, and had less power to restrain speech on whatever interested her. At last, however, she allowed herself to be kissed and persuaded off to bed, and Clare, sinking into a chair, dropped her forehead into her hands, and let herself utter a low cry: "I cannot bear it; oh, I cannot bear it!"

His illness and absence had seemed at the time to reach the limits of the intolerable; but to see him, to pass him in the street, or meet him at rehearsal and return his formal greeting, given without meeting her eye, seemed more than she could bear. Herr Hänfling was still taking the leading parts, so their contact on the stage was of the slightest; when it did occur, she felt as

though a barrier of ice was between them. It was precisely what she had demanded; yet it made her writhe in a kind of humiliation. She told herself that she need not have been so concerned; that he had been easily able to overcome his transient passion; he was so cold, so self-controlled; she should be ashamed not to be able to rival his indifference. In truth, if he had wished to attach her more strongly to him, he could have gone no surer way to work. Had he pursued her with sighs or regretful looks, she would have been able to maintain her proud and defensive attitude; as it was, though she constantly told herself they would soon have both forgotten that there had ever been anything between them, her heart cried after him and would not be stilled.

But that evening something had happened. As they were going off the stage, it chanced that she dropped her bracelet, and he, following her, nearly stepped on it, and picking it up, called to her; she stopped and held out her hand, and, the other actors passing on, they were for a moment alone. As he put it on he bungled with the fastening, and she felt his shaking fingers touch her arm. Impatiently she tried to snatch away arm and bracelet, but his hand closed upon her wrist. "One moment, please; I must speak to you. I see you are angry because I have not been able to do as I said and go away. I thought I might have arranged it, but there were several difficulties in the way, and as Hänfling is still here——"

She interrupted him. "Pray, say no more about it. I am sure there is no necessity. I was absurd to demand it; I made far too much of a passing folly."

He looked at her a moment, then answered her bitter tone rather than her words.

"It is not a light task that is laid on me," he said. "If it is any satisfaction to you to know I suffer, you are

welcome to the knowledge." And with that he let her go.

The remembrance came back upon her now with a sharp stab. Why need she have been so cruel? And how useless it had been! She had pretended too much, and only betrayed to him how bitterly she cared. She needed not to recall the look with which he had spoken; it was printed on her brain; she should see it, she knew, whenever she looked at him. And what was to be the end of it?

She sat there before her looking-glass, her brush idle in her hand, musing, till a resolution slowly formed. "There is only one thing I can do for him," she said under her breath; "and I will do it." She twisted her long hair into a knot, and went over to the writing table, where she lighted two more candles and rummaged in her blotting-book for a telegraph form. Then she wrote rapidly: "Is your offer of last February still open to me? Wire reply." This she addressed to the Russian impresario she had met in America, and who had since approached her again with another and still better offer. She happened to know he was just now in Paris, so her answer should not be long in coming.

There was still a letter to be written, but that needed longer thought. She sat leaning over the table with her pen in her hand, and at last, almost involuntarily, her fingers traced the words—"My dearest." She had never before used any word of endearment to him, unless it were in the secrecy of her own thought; but now, this last time that she should ever address him, her heart cried out for utterance. She looked at it a moment, then

- tore the paper across and took another sheet, and this time began without preface:

"You have kept your promise, and it was horrid of me to seem to reproach you. I never meant it. It is

for me to go, for I cannot bear it any longer. I ought to say 'Try to forget me,' but I cannot. This must be our good-by, for I shall be gone before you get my letter. I have a thousand things to say to you, but I cannot write them, and they will never be spoken now. God keep you always.

"CLARE."

She read it over slowly, tears welling and burning behind her eyes. Then the chill realization came over her of the folly of writing at all. Let her sacrifice be complete, if it was to be of any use. Deliberately she tore what she had written into strips and burned them one by one in her candlestick. Then she took a fresh sheet and wrote another note, and this time it was directed to Frau Dahlmann.

When at last she got to bed the tranquilizing effect of a resolution made her sleep till her maid brought her early cup of tea and she could dispatch her telegram. While she waited for the answer she busied herself with preparations for a hasty departure; for, be the reply what it might, she was resolved to go—if not to St. Petersburg, then elsewhere; but till she knew the where she would not disturb her mother. Before long it came, curt but satisfactory: "Certainly. Meet me in Berlin to-morrow."

With it in her hand she went to her mother's room; Madame Malaxa was not yet up, and Clare was seized with a spasm of misgiving as she saw how old and frail she looked.

"Mother," she said as she seated herself on the edge of the bed, "I am going to make an extraordinary demand of you. Do you think you would mind a sudden journey? To leave Blankenstadt altogether, I mean!"

"Leave Blankenstadt! My dear child, you forget your contract——"

"I don't forget; I have resolved to break it. I must go. Do you remember that M. Petroff who was so anxious to get me to St. Petersburg? This telegram is from him; he wants me to meet him to-morrow at Berlin."

"To-morrow! You take my breath away."

"I know it is too bad to ask it of you. I could, of course, go on, and you could follow me at leisure; but then you would have the journey alone, and, besides, it might be very unpleasant for you here, meeting the Intendant and people; for, of course, I have no business to do it. But I might never get so good a chance again."

Madame Malaxa raised herself in bed and looked at her daughter.

"Clare," she said, "something has happened. There is more in this than you have told me."

Clare struggled with herself for a moment. "Oh, if it could be without explanations! but you have a right to know, and I will try to make it clear. Mother, you remember what friends Herr Dahlmann and I used to be?"

"Yes, indeed. You have quarreled with him?"

"Quarreled? No, far worse."

"My dear!"

"No, don't speak till I have finished. He has behaved perfectly, as such a man as he would behave. Only it is too hard; we can neither of us bear it. He would have gone, and I believe he is keeping out of his best parts because of me. Now you understand, you will make it easy for me to go?"

"Of course I will; we will start as soon as you please. Oh, my poor darling, for long I have been afraid of this!" She held out her arms to her daughter, but Clare drew back.

"I believe the wisest thing would be to start to-day, before it gets wind. I am not at all sure I cannot

be officially detained if it gets about before I am across the frontier; I don't quite know what the law of contract is, for I never wanted to evade it before. I know there will be a heavy fine to pay; but that will all get itself settled when we are in Russia. Dearest, you are good to consent to these sudden extraordinary proceedings. Now I must go and pack; there will be much to see to. I will send Babette to you."

She stooped and kissed her mother hastily and went out.

Clare had thought to insure that her letter to Frau Dahlmann should not be delivered till after her departure by asking the Hausmann to post it when she should have left; but he, in an excess of zeal stimulated by a liberal parting tip, hastened to deliver it by hand so promptly that Hedwig received it just as the writer and her mother were entering their droschky to drive to the station. She was reading it when her husband came in from the dining room after his solitary dinner. She had had hers on a tray, for she was still confined to the sofa. She looked up with a little flush on her face, and watched him narrowly as she asked:

"Did you know Miss Arrowsmith was going to leave Blankenstadt, Friedel?"

"No; I don't think she is. Who told you?"

He thought only of Blankenstadt gossip and Frau Pappelheim's tongue, and spoke quite unconcernedly.

"She herself. She has written and enclosed P. P. C. cards. You can read it if you like. Is this really the first you had heard of it?"

He was on his guard now, and answered very steadily: "She mentioned some weeks ago—before my illness, I think it was—that she had had a very good offer from Russia; but I understood that her contract would keep her till next year. Well, let me see what she says."

He took it, and resolutely kept his face from changing as he read:

"MY DEAR FRAU DAHLMANN: By the time this is in your hands my mother and I shall be on our way to St. Petersburg, but I cannot let our P. P. C. cards reach you without a word of explanation. We were so sorry not to be able to call and say good-by, but you will understand that when one behaves as I am doing, one daren't say anything about it till it is a *fait accompli*. I know I shall be well abused, and people will say I am fleeing from the rivalry of Madame Blavinsky; but I must trust that my friends will understand my motives better.

"With my mother's kind regards to you and your husband, hoping you are now quite recovered.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CLARE ARROWSMITH."

He read to the end and laid it down without a word. Just one sentence spoke to him: "I trust my friends will understand." What was there that anyone but he could understand? She must have meant him to read between the lines there.

"Friedel, don't go!" His wife's voice recalled him. "There is something I want to say to you. I see from that how silly I was ever to fancy things and vex you with my suspicions. Nothing could be more indifferent than that note; she does not even send you a message. I am sorry I was such a goose, and you have been so good to me lately. Do forgive me!"

He looked at her as though she were speaking from a great way off, and he could not catch the sense. Then, with an effort, he said, "Let bygones rest, Hedwig." He moved to the door.

"Oh, are you going out?"

"Only into the other room for a few minutes. I shall be at hand if you want me."

"Then give me my book before you go, and just put this in the rubbish basket." She tore the note across, and he took the fragments with a hand that was rigid in its determination not to shake, and went away with a bitterness like death upon him.

Gone! Without word or sign to him! She must have intended this last night when they spoke together. She might have trusted him. The longing for one last word, for a farewell that should be less bitter to look back upon than the blank misery of their brief interview last night, was strong upon him; he began to debate with himself whether she could indeed have started. Berlin would surely be the first stage of her journey, and unless she had set off at break of day the train she must take had not yet left. He looked at his watch; the station was near; if he made haste it would yet be possible to look on her once more. He went to the door and called to Toni's nurse that she might take charge of her mistress while he was gone. He waited an instant, his foot upon the stair, till the girl should answer. In a minute she came.

"Did you call, sir? Did my mistress want me?"

"No; you can go back again. I was going out. I am not going."

He hung up his hat, and turned back to the room. To what end should he go? To look in her face, perhaps to touch her hand, and keep silence. And if he could not? If his misery were to prove too strong for him, and word or look in that public place should undo all that they had fought for? Clare had nerved herself to leave him without message or token; he had no right to force upon her, unlooked for, the strain that such a parting, in such a place, must be.

He sat down by the window, and bowed his head upon

the sill, gripping the ledge with both hands, as though to keep himself by physical force from following with the body where his heart was gone. The minutes went by while he sat there motionless, till presently a rattling, jarring sound came nearer, the only sound he could have heard at that moment—the train passing by the opening at the bottom of the street. As it went grinding and rumbling on, its crushing weight seemed to go over heart and hope and happiness, and a smothered sob escaped him.

Ten minutes later Hedwig's plaintive voice sounded from the adjoining room:

"Friedel, are you there still? What are you doing? How quiet you are! I do wish you would come and sit in here with me; I am so dull."

"I will come in a few minutes."

He looked at the torn scraps of paper in his hand, folded them together, and put them in his breast. Then he rose, wiped his forehead, and, going over to the side-board, drank off a tumbler of water at a draught.

"Well, what shall we do to amuse you?" he said, re-entering the drawing room; "would you like a game of halma?"

XXXV.

FIVE years had passed since Blankenstadt had been electrified by Miss Arrowsmith's breach of contract; five years to her of hard work, of increasing renown, of chance and change more stimulating than the humdrum round of a German Residenz; of sorrow too, for she was alone now; three years since her mother had been taken away; but not before the old close, tender relation between them had been fully restored. St. Petersburg was still her headquarters, though she was often in London, in Paris, or in America; only in Germany never again. She had even refused the coveted crown of honor—to sing at Bayreuth. She said that, being professionally disgraced in Blachsen, it would never do for her to be seen in such a meeting ground of German singers, where Blankenstadt was always so well represented.

She had taken up a social line quite different to the recluse, studious life of her girhood, and her Wednesday afternoons were appreciated by some of the best people in St. Petersburg. She was not one of those singers who are a voice and nothing more, and her cultivated charm drew about her all that was best worth having in the intellectual as well as the music-loving world.

She was rich now, and could afford to surround herself with all that gave her pleasure; but in the beauty of her rooms was observable the same touch of self-restraint, of severity in selection, that appeared in her dress and always characterized her. She never indulged in the wanton luxury of the typical prima donna, and perhaps this was one reason among many why her guests never

wearied of her. Even in the flowers which she loved there was choice, not profusion.

The five years which had led her well into the thirties, and which are years of loss to most women in the matter of books, had brought gain to her. She had never had girlish bloom to lose; and her maturity had won a charm, a ripeness, wanting to the crudity of her girlhood. What had been hard was softened, what was sharp had mellowed. There was as much fire as ever in the lustrous eyes, whose brilliance was only enhanced by an early powdering of silver in the black hair; as much expression in the mobile features, but manner and countenance had won a harmonious repose.

Among the little crowd about her tea table one Wednesday a gray-mustached Englishman was watching her, and noting the changes with the sympathetic eye of an old friend. He kept himself rather in the background; he had had his word of greeting, and would wait for further conversation with her till later. He took his coffee cup and stood back in the embrasure of a window, from which he could see the movements of her graceful head and the animated play of countenance with which she turned from one to the other of her guests. Presently two other men stepped back and stood just in front of him, so that he overheard a few words of their conversation, which was in French.

"Miss Arrowsmith has revived the almost lost art *tenir un salon*," said the elder of the two, a man with a white imperial.

"True; and she owes it to the same peculiar gift enjoyed by some of the past mistresses of the craft of old days—the power to inspire without ever sharing sentiment. She is an icicle."

"You have experienced it?" said the other with a slight shrug.

"*Dieu m'en garde!* No, I speak as an observer, a student of humanity merely. Most women, if you notice, especially most singers or actresses, in whom sentiment is largely developed, sacrifice the many to the favorite of the moment, and the salon collapses: it is *Elle et Lui*—and an audience. Here we are all pawns alike, and all equally valuable in her social game."

"Yet," said the first speaker, "you will never make me believe that a woman who can give us such a Senta, such an Elisabeth as we have heard this winter, is a woman without heart. She is a young woman yet, despite her gray hair, but, depend upon it, she has lived her life already."

They moved away, and Colonel Barre approached the table to set down his cup. Clare looked round and smiled at him without breaking off her conversation, and he remained standing near her. They were discussing a new singer who had just made his mark in Tristan.

"He was excellent in the first two acts," said an *attaché* from the German embassy, who fancied himself as a musical connoisseur; "but his death scene was deplorable, conventional to a degree: he died in a series of jerks. I never saw but one man whose dying satisfied me, and that was at Bayreuth in 18—. You must remember him—Dahlmann. Surely; he used to sing with you at Blankenstadt."

"Yes, I remember him perfectly." The watcher at her elbow could detect the curious, fine smile that hovered for a moment about her lips. "I sang with him for many years."

"Then you can tell me," pursued the *attaché* with eagerness, "what has become of him?"

She turned her head a little aside. "I wish I could. I have lost sight of him of late."

"Ah, in good time! Here is the fountain of operatic intelligence. De Rigaud,"—as a Frenchman in *pince-nez* approached the group,—“Miss Arrowsmith wants to know what has become of Dahlmann, the tenor who used to sing at Blankenstadt.”

The man addressed, journalist and musical critic, who held the strings of most musical successes, shrugged his shoulders and turned out the palms of his hands.

“What does become of a singer who has ceased to sing? Extinction.”

“Granted he has ceased to exist for the public, I suppose you will allow he may still exist for himself somewhere, poor beggar!” said a fashionable baritone, across whose mind swept for an instant a vision of himself—extinct; as death may sometimes project his unwelcome shadow across our pathway in the full tide of sunshine.

“Ah!” said the journalist, “now you remind me of it, I believe I did once hear of him, not so very long ago either. Some fellow told me he came across him in London in great poverty and obscurity; I believe he tried to get him pupils. I think it was Dahlmann, but I am not sure.”

Not in vain had Clare practiced for fifteen years upon the stage to control all expression of emotion. The hand which placed a cup farther from the edge of the table shook a very little, but the face, always pale, showed only the pained gravity natural on hearing of the fate of an old comrade, or perhaps a trace of that personal feeling which had touched the baritone.

“I knew,” she said, “that he had been obliged to give up singing; I had no idea he had been so unfortunate.” And then she was silent for a minute, recalling word for word the one scrap of intelligence that had reached her in all these years about the man she loved. It had been in the music article of some paper, about two years after

her leaving Blankenstadt: "We regret to have to record the retirement from the operatic stage of Herr Dahlmann, the renowned tenor, whose Tristan at the last Bayreuth performances will be fresh in the memory of all lovers of music. His too brief career has been a brilliant one, and his loss will be much regretted at Blankenstadt. We understand it is in consequence of complete loss of voice, following a severe illness."

She had been in the south of France when this reached her, and it was only a few weeks after her mother's death. She had written to Armbrecht to make inquiry, but her letter, which had been following him about, remained for some weeks unanswered. He, too, had left Blankenstadt, but he was able to tell her that Dahlmann had gone to stay with the pastor at Lindenthal to recruit, and intended to give lessons. Later, coming across some acquaintance from Blankenstadt, she learned that he had left the neighborhood, and no one seemed able to tell her whither he had gone.

It was only for a moment or two that her troubled silence lasted; then she moved away to talk to some of her other guests, till they had all dispersed, leaving only Colonel Barre, who took the right of an old friend, and one who had traveled so far to see her, to outstay the rest.

"I, too, ought to be taking my leave," he said, looking irresolute; "you must be tired after all your exertions, but I have hardly had any conversation with you."

"No, no! I am not in the least tired, and if I were it would refresh me to talk to an old friend. I only waited till we could have a quiet talk; there were so many coming and going this afternoon. You must come and dine with me to-morrow. To-night we are dining out, but I need not go and dress for an hour yet. What brings you to St. Petersburg?"

Madame Renouf, the *dame de compagnie* who had lived with Clare since her mother's death, was moving quietly about the room, straightening the disarray; she looked at the gray-headed Colonel for a moment, and quietly effaced herself. He waited till she was gone.

"You ask me that? You do not guess my errand?"

"How should I?"

He drew a chair near her and sat down. There was an old-fashioned formality in his manner that thinly covered a nervous agitation.

"Five years ago," he said, "you wrote me a letter which you intended to be final. I accepted it for the time; but life goes on, and the years bring healing, and the things we thought irreparable have been overlived. I said to myself, 'She is too proud a woman not to have overcome an—unfortunate attachment; after all these years she will surely let the love that has been waiting so long for her complete her cure.' I have not hurried you; I have had long patience. Have I not deserved my reward?"

"Deserved? If such things went by deservings! Your generosity and trust in me humble me to the dust. That you should ever have thought again of a woman who actually confessed to you that she was in love with a man she had no right to think of! How could you do it!"

"How could I not? Your courageous avowal only filled me with a passionate pity for you—for myself. I came to make one last effort; with an almost despairing hope; but since I have heard from your own lips in the course of conversation how completely that sad story is a thing of the past, I approach you with confidence."

"You guessed, then, who it was that came between us?—but of course you did; and neither Herr Dahlmann nor I had anything to be ashamed of. As you heard me say, I have neither seen nor heard from him since. But

do you really think that could make any difference? Can't you take your own constancy for the measure of mine?"

He looked at her, staggered. "You mean that, after all, you love him still?"

She raised her head and met his glance. "With every fiber of my soul I do!"

There was a moment's absolute silence, then she spoke again. "Is it strange and unwomanly of me to say it to you? Do you remember, in 'Wuthering Heights,' what Catherine says of Heathcliff?—'He is more myself than I am.' That is what he is to me."

Colonel Barre kept for a moment a stunned silence. Then he rose.

"Forgive me," he said, "for having wrung this confession from you a second time. I ought to leave you now, but I shall not see you again, and before I go I want to tell you something that, if you heard afterward, you might misunderstand. Before I started to come here I had come to the conclusion that it was my duty to marry; my duty to the family, to the old name, which else will die out with me; and I resolved that I would make one last effort to win the only woman I ever desired for my wife. If you hear shortly of my marriage, you will not conclude that I rushed from you in pique, like an angry boy, to console myself with the first young girl that took my fancy."

"I should never conclude anything of you but what was honorable and good. I shall be more glad than I can say; and you will find, I know, some woman far better suited to be your wife than I could ever have been."

"I may easily enough find one suited to the outward requirements of my position," he returned bitterly, "since the companion my heart asks is denied me. In

fact, my sisters have already selected the young lady they hope my choice will fall on. She is pleasing, well-bred, well connected in the county, with a small fortune, and though considerably younger than myself, more than a mere girl. If she can be contented with the regard which is all I can offer her,—I shall pretend to no more,—there will be no delay. I think she will; she is not a person of sentiment.” He picked up his hat and gloves. “When you hear from me again, it will be to ask your good wishes.”

She put both hands in his. “They will always be yours. If you can realize the happiness I wish for you, it will be good measure, pressed down and running over. Good-by. But I shall see you again?”

“No, not again. I shall start back to England tomorrow. Good-by. God bless you!”

He was still holding her hands, and he raised them to his lips.

“That is the most chivalrous man I ever knew,” was Clare’s thought as the door closed behind him.

She stood for a moment by the table, dreamily straightening the things on it. “In poverty and obscurity,” she repeated to herself, and sighed deeply; her thoughts had already left Geoffrey Barre. “If only I could find him and give him help without his knowing where it came from!”

A German newspaper lay unfolded on the table—one which the *attaché* had brought to show her an account of a new opera just produced at Blankenstadt. It was a Blachsen paper, and the familiar names came to her with a thrill of association quickened by the mention of the love of those old days. She turned it over to the outside, and glanced down the column of births, deaths, and marriages, to see if there were any names she knew. Out of the meaningless succession, the one that was in

her heart leaped to meet her sight. "On the 20th of December, at the Lindenthaler Mill, near Blankenstadt, Hedwig, wife of Ehrenfried Dahlmann, aged thirty."

And his name had been lying there, almost in their sight, just under her hand, while they had been talking of him!

XXXVI.

THE crowd which gathers thick about the shilling entrance to St. James' Hall by two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, especially when there is to be a Wagner concert, has its own marked characteristics. It is largely masculine, and the feminine element is dowdy; the smart hats flock to the Ballad Concert at the Albert Hall rather; it is very silent, serious, and intent on what is coming, marvelously patient, and less disposed to poke its elbows into its neighbor's ribs than other crowds. It is composed, for the most part, of units. People do not make up parties to come to these concerts; for the pleasure-seeker are there not the *matinées*, Olympia, the river? The majority have the air of solitary workers, foreigners, many of them, seeking in music the universal home in a strange land.

Among the earliest arrived, wedged close against the door by the ever-increasing pressure of the throng behind, stood a tall German with a fair-haired boy beside him. They had been standing there a long while, and every now and then the boy broke into a little murmur of impatience, but the man never moved. If he had been waiting outside the gates of Paradise he could hardly have been more lost to all about him. His eyes were fixed upon the poster at the side, on which it was announced that on that afternoon Miss Arrowsmith would sing excerpts from "Lohengrin" and "Tristan und Isolde." He had never seen her since that night, so long ago, when she had sung Elsa and another had filled his wonted part.

More than a year had passed since he had been free to seek out his old love if he would; but, till this day, he had made no step toward her. Though she might have lost sight of him, he had never lost sight of her, but had followed her movements, as the daily papers chronicled them, through all these years. His renunciation had been complete; and it was not in him, when his ailing wife, who in her weakness and suffering had grown to cling to him, was taken away, to turn back to the passion of his youth. It lay deep down, covered over with the duties and cares of daily living. Even now, when Clare was in England, and he could so easily have found her address and called upon her, he held back; he would rather at any rate see her first, himself unseen, hear her sing, and learn, as he knew he should learn from the mere sound of her voice, whether she were still the Clare of his fond memory.

The longest waiting must come to an end at last. There was a grinding of the key in the lock, a movement of expectation through the crowd like a wind over a corn-field, and the door swung back. Then followed the squeeze and the rush upstairs and along the passages, till Dahlmann and his son found themselves safely landed in the front row of the gallery. Still nearly another hour of patient or impatient waiting; till at long last the familiar strains of the overture to "*Lohengrin*" fell upon the listener's ear, transporting him far from the foggy London concert hall. He closed his eyes; the bare platform vanished, and he saw the wide stage at Blankenstadt, and he was standing in the wings, ready to go on, with the eagerness of the war horse for the battle, of the racer for the course; till, as the final chord swept the illusion away, there rushed over him the "never again" that Fate had spoken, and brought a lump to his throat. He leaned his forehead for a moment

against the cold iron pillar in front of the gallery; then he felt a touch on his knee, and heard the boy's eager voice:

"There she is, father. Will you have the glasses?"

No need for glasses; his eyes seemed to swallow the intervening space and bring her to him, close, close! How unchanged she was! Just the same little tricks of head and hand, so well remembered and so dear; the same easy, unconscious pose. If time had brought her greater softness, it had not robbed her of one charm. He held his breath to hear her wonderful voice, the singing that was like the singing of a bird for spontaneous outflow. It was like a draught of water to one who has long been famishing with thirst. Yet here the ear that loved each note could detect a change. There used to be a certain metallic vibration, a flaw perhaps, but a characteristic; that was gone, and with it the ring of buoyant youthfulness; there had come instead a mellow tone of inexpressible tenderness, a wistfulness that tightened the throat of those that listened and made their eyes fill. The thought came to Ehrenfried: "Does she ever think of me when she sings?"

Toni, whose rapt face showed that he had inherited the soul of a musician, was in an ecstasy of enjoyment, only once or twice he glanced anxiously at his father; and when Miss Arrowsmith had disappeared, and the applause was over, he leaned forward and whispered: "Are you feeling ill, father? Shall we go out? Never mind about me."

Ehren smiled and shook his head, and the boy returned to his rapturous enjoyment of the orchestral piece that followed. Before the end of the programme Dahlmann took out a card and scribbled on it: "May I call upon you? Where are you staying?" As they came out, instead of making for the main entrance, he found his

way round to a passage leading to the performers' exit, and giving Toni the card, bade him ask the first attendant he met to take him to Miss Arrowsmith. "I will wait here by the door," he said.

In a very few minutes the child reappeared with two ladies. "Father's here," he was saying in his high voice. "He said he would wait."

Dahlmann hastened forward when he saw her, wordless for the moment, and they met with a handshake as though they had parted yesterday. She was the first to speak.

"I had no idea you were here till Toni told me," she said. "You must come and see me. We are staying at the Hotel Cecil. Won't you drive back with us now?"

"Thanks, I am afraid I must not. I have a pupil at six, and we must be getting back. You will be staying in town?" He heard his own polite voice as if it were someone else's.

"Yes, for some weeks, I think. Come to-morrow to lunch, you and Toni, won't you? It is so long since——" She caught her breath a little. "Let me introduce you to Madame Renouf, who lives with me," as she drew forward a very quiet-looking woman in slight mourning.

The invitation was accepted, and then he put them into their carriage, and the first meeting was over.

As they hurried along the streets to the district railway, Toni slipped his hand into his father's arm.

"I think she was pleased to see us, father," he remarked; "for she kissed me. I suppose she had forgotten I am nearly twelve. I expect I looked surprised, for she laughed and said she knew me when I was a little chap, and I couldn't remember her; but I do."

Six years ago, if either could have foreseen that they should this day be sitting at table together, it would have seemed that life could offer them no better joy; now that

the reality was come, the moment was fraught with difficulty. There lay so much between them that could not be spoken of. How could they begin again like old friends, when vividly in the minds of both rose the recollection of the bitter words they had said to each other when they stood a moment in the wings the last time they had sung together? To part so, and then to meet after so long, was too hard.

Madame Renouf, a shy, quiet woman, who always envied Miss Arrowsmith's easy manner, looked from one to another in surprise. She had never seen her friend comport herself so like a shy schoolgirl, and she had seen her in much more imposing company than this unsuccessful, rather shabby singing-master. Probably, after all, she was only bored. He was evidently an old acquaintance, fallen on evil days; most likely she wanted to help him, and hardly knew how. He looked proud; no doubt, that was the explanation. If she could have looked below the surface, she would have seen her haughty Clare trembling before the only man she had ever felt afraid of, and blushing inwardly at the remembrance of her own avowal, made when she thought him lost to her.

Not being gifted with second-sight, the good woman pursued her well-intentioned way, and tried to keep up the conversation on such topics as might interest the visitor, with a note of patronage that made Clare long to shake her. Yet she could do nothing; all the things of which she longed to hear seemed bristling with difficulty. Of the years of wandering that followed the Blankenstadt days he would not speak; still less of the humiliations and distresses of his last year there, when his voice was gradually going. Far more from what he evaded than from what he said could she guess at what he had been through. One moment of approach there was when he told her of

the death of the friend who had been like a brother to him. Of Madame Malaxa, too, neither felt able to speak, though his heart was full of his old friend, and Clare longed to know whether the nameless cross of lilies-of-the-valley which had reached her from Germany on the day of her mother's funeral had come from him, as she guessed.

It was no better after lunch, and very soon Ehrenfried rose to go, with the chill conviction that the past can never be brought back; that, as the poet sings, "There are no birds in last year's nests." Clare detained him with a wistfulness that was not lost upon her companion.

"Oh, not yet!" she said. "We are not thinking of going out, and I want so much to hear Toni play; he tells me he is so fond of music."

It was a welcome suggestion, for the boy was at the age most difficult to entertain, not child enough to be played with nor old enough to enter easily into grown-up conversation; unused to ladies too, a little *gauche*, and disposed to adhere to the arm of his father's chair. He had shot up out of the chubby child Clare remembered into a long slip of a lad, with a touch of his mother's pensiveness; a little overweighted, too, with musical sensibility for his eleven years.

His playing was something quite out of the common for his age, and when he had finished a selection of the "Davidsbündler," Madame Renouf exclaimed: "I wonder you don't let him play in public, Herr Dahlmann! He plays quite like a professional. I am sure he would succeed."

"Thank Heaven, he is too big for an infant prodigy," said his father rather shortly; "and he has to study many years yet before he can take a serious place."

The boy turned half round on the music stool. "I do

wish you could persuade father to let me," he said, "and then he need not work so hard himself. All last winter, when he was ill, he would go about teaching in those horrid fogs while I was at school. I am sure I could earn a lot, if he'd only let me. Smaller fellows than I do. Why, that little Bruno Steindel is only seven!"

"Hush, Toni! We don't discuss our private affairs in company."

The boy flushed crimson to the roots of his hair, and Dahlmann said dryly, "I have not come to exploiting my child yet, and while I can keep my head above water and send him to a good school, I don't mean to."

There was an embarrassed pause; then Madame Renouf created a welcome diversion by proposing that she and Toni should betake themselves to the reading room to hunt out some *Punches* she had been telling him about. She was a kind woman and saw that the boy was confused; besides, it occurred to her that if his father and Miss Arrowsmith had affairs to discuss,—possibly he might want to borrow money,—they would get on better alone.

"You must not fancy," Dahlmann said abruptly, when the door had closed on them, "from Toni's random talk that we are not getting on very well now. Just at first, of course, there was a little difficulty. It is always hard work making fresh beginnings late in life, and we had illness and expenses. I made an attempt on London once before that did not answer; but now I am getting quite a good connection. I mean to send the boy to St. Paul's School next year."

Clare turned her head away for an instant; she felt choking. Was this what the golden dreams had come to? Her voice shook when she spoke again:

"And are you well again now?"

"Between whiles," he said with a smile; "but asthma

is like a cat with a mouse: it lets you go and pounces on you again. And now give me the greatest pleasure, and let me hear you sing once again before I go."

"If you wish it. I wonder you don't hate it," she said as she opened the piano. She could hardly command her voice, for his "once again" was ringing in her ears. When this was over he would say good-by and go, and there an end. Better they had never met again. She sang, one after another, some of his old favorites, as she used to sing them to him at the Finkenwiese. For a few moments she paused; then, in a voice that was low, and shook, she sang the tender appeal of "Allerseelen," with its pathetic refrain: "Wie einst im Mai; wie einst im Mai." When she ceased there came no word of thanks from the listening figure by the window. She rose and came round the end of the piano and stood close beside him.

"Ehren," she said, "I think you are treating me very cruelly. We are neither of us young now, and men are not like women; it may easily be that to you the past looks like a half-forgotten folly, but I cannot forget that we were friends. I would sooner have never seen you again than have you treat me as a stranger because our lots in the world have fallen differently. You have grown proud with a false pride since I knew you."

He gave her a long full look, before which her eyes dropped.

"It is because I feel that only one relation is possible between you and me," he said; "and that is not possible. What am I now? What have I to offer? Broken health, broken fortunes, a career cut short."

"As if all that mattered, if you love me still."

"If you care to know," he went on, "how I have held you in my heart all these years, I will show you a token." He drew out from inside his waistcoat a tiny bag, worn

on an eyeglass cord, and from it took four fragments of a notesheet with her writing on them.

"Oh, that cruel, hard little note!" she cried, as she fitted them together. "If I ever had repented me of my sins as I did of that letter,—the most virtuous, I suppose, I ever wrote,—I should be a saint by now. If you had seen the one I wrote you and burned! How could you keep that?"

"It was the last one your dear hand had touched. Besides, there was a message to me in it, wasn't there, hidden between the lines? It said: 'I go for your sake, to make the straight path easier.'"

"It did: it tried to say so."

"And I thank you for it with all my heart. But now—oh, my dearest, are you sure your compassion for me is not blinding you? Are you verily sure it would be no sacrifice to you to link your brilliant life with my broken one?"

"Sacrifice!" She gave a little laugh that ended in a sob.

He held out his arms to her, and for long neither spoke. In that wordless clasp all the long pain and patience of many years were turning into joy. At last Clare murmured, as she laid her cheek against his, "Ah, if I could but give you my voice!"

"You give me yourself," he answered, "and I am content."

"If we had never come together," she mused presently, "if life had kept us inexorably apart, what would have become of our love? Could it have been in vain?"

"I do not think it," he answered. "Truly, I believe there is something of the eternal in some love. I dare say there is a good deal that belongs to this world, and dies and is buried when its time comes; but I cannot think that a love which has survived denial and separa-

tion, and lived through what ours has, can belong altogether to the things of time. Since it is one of the strongest powers of our souls, while they are immortal it must be immortal, too. No! I hold you not only for the few brief years that may remain to us here, but for always."

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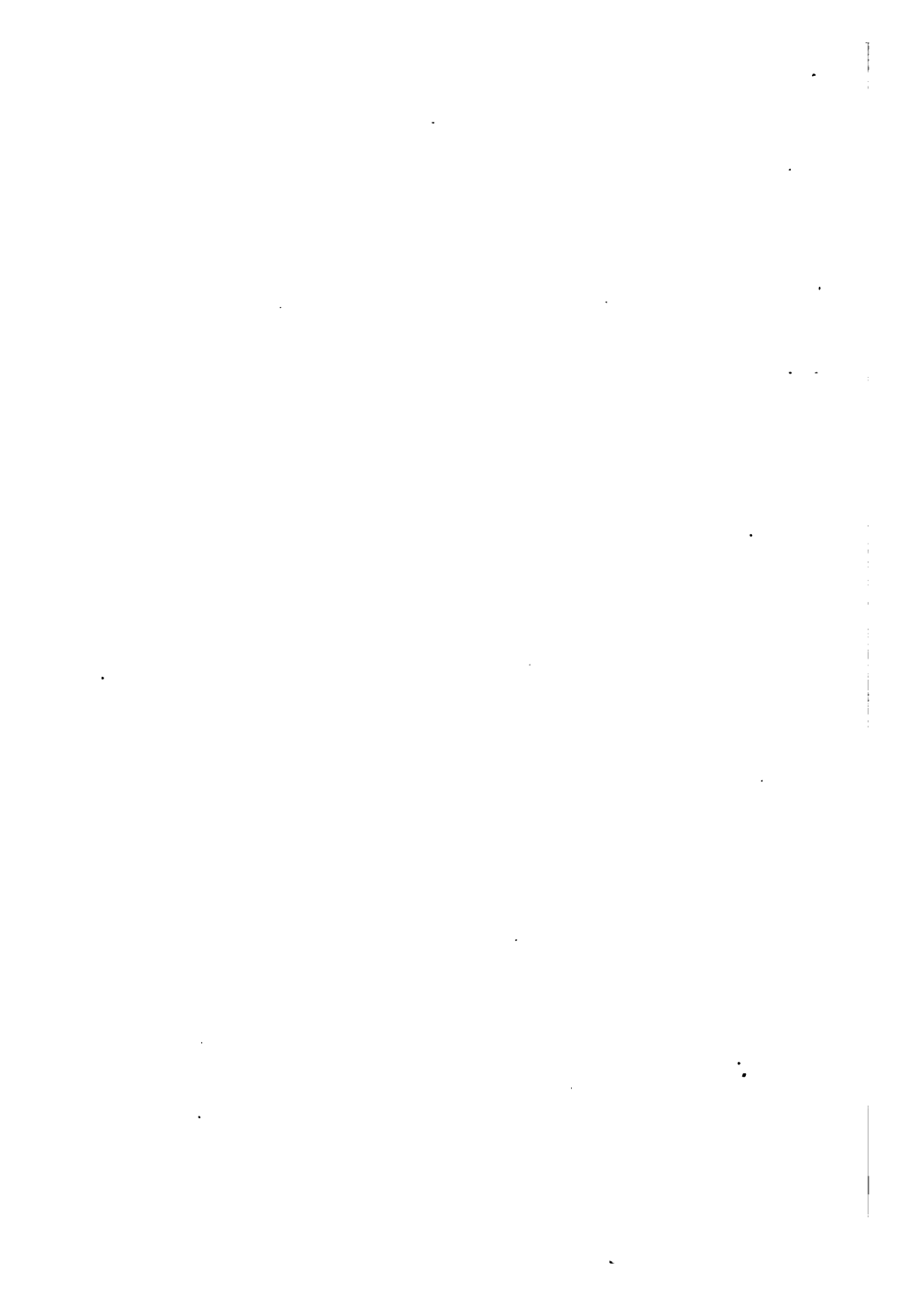
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